

**RESURRECTION: RENEWAL AND REBIRTH IN CONGREGATIONS
WHICH HAVE EXPERIENCED BETRAYAL OF THE PASTORAL TRUST**

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ABSTRACT

Resurrection: Renewal and Rebirth in Congregations which have Experienced Betrayal of the Pastoral Trust

by

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There are presently hundreds of congregations in virtually all denominations where there has been a betrayal of the pastoral trust by clergy who have engaged in sexual misconduct. The study shows that the resurrection of such a congregation is dependent upon the congregation's developing a clear understanding of healthy leadership models; appropriate boundaries and expectations; and open methods of decision making, conflict resolution and communication so that it can articulate a renewed sense of mission, revitalize its ministries, restore its financial base, and incorporate new members.

The study focuses upon the experience of one congregation by examining the congregation as a secondary victim of the clergy misconduct. It examines healthy models of lay and clergy leadership. Given the unique nature of clergy leadership; it pays particular attention to ways in which clergy should structure both their professional and personal lives. Attention is also paid to the role of the congregation and the responsibilities incumbent upon the congregation and lay leadership.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction describing the problem, its significance for the church, the scope and limitation of the study, a discussion of the major terms, the assumptions of the study, and the methodology to be used. Chapter 2 provides an analysis

of congregations from a systems perspective. Chapter 3 provides a history of the congregation upon which the study is based. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of leadership styles and the particular challenge of the type of leadership required in these traumatized congregations. Chapter 5 presents a curriculum proposal for the resurrection of congregations through the renewal of its sense of self-esteem, the revitalization of its ministries, the restoration of its financial base, and the incorporation of new members, thereby allowing it to pursue its life as a resurrected community ready to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world.

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This work is dedicated to Kathleen, Mark,
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without whose love, prayers, and support
it could never have been completed.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Presently there are hundreds of congregations in virtually all denominations which have experienced a betrayal of the pastoral trust because the clergy serving in those congregations have engaged in sexual misconduct. Peter Rutter and G. Lloyd Rediger, in their respective studies of sexual misconduct, estimate that ten percent of the clergy have engaged in sexual misconduct.¹ Moreover, Rediger further claims that another fifteen percent are "on the verge--waiting for an opportunity."² James Stein has done a study of the ministry of "after pastors": a term used to describe an individual who follows the ministry of a clergy person who has betrayed the pastoral trust, most often through sexual misconduct. In this study Stein quotes a lecture by Marie Fortune in which she reported on a study of five mainline Protestant denominations which revealed that "twelve and one half percent of the clergy surveyed admitted to having had sexual intercourse with parishioners [while] an additional thirty-five percent indicated that they had engaged in sexual contact other than intercourse with members and counselees!"³ Stein goes on to comment that these figures are consistent with the experience of his

¹Peter Rutter, Sex in the Forbidden Zone (New York: Fawcett, Crest, 1989), 36; and G. Lloyd Rediger, Ministry and Sexuality: Cases, Counseling, Care (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 1-2.

²Rediger, 1-2.

³James P. Stein, "Bridging the Gap: Restoring Trust after Sexual Misconduct" (D. Min. diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1992), 5.

denomination, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.⁴

Within the last five years in the Diocese of Los Angeles of the Episcopal Church, ten percent of the congregations have had the experience of having their clergy removed from active ministry because of sexual misconduct. Since this project was begun in 1994, an Episcopal bishop has committed suicide as a result of the disclosure of his sexual misconduct. Even after all of the publicity and disciplinary actions on the part of many of the major judicatories, an indication of how widespread and persistent the problem of clergy sexual misconduct is can be seen in a recent issue of Penthouse magazine. The December 1996 issue had an article, complete with photographs, containing a graphic description of the activities of a group “of gay and bisexual cross-dressing Episcopal priests whose private lives include the most bizarre rituals, often performed before the altars of darkened churches . . . [which] involve about half a dozen priests and . . . young men they brought from Brazil.”⁵

This problem of clergy sexual misconduct which church leaders, across denominational lines, are still reluctantly being forced to confront, threatens the very foundation of the Christian faith. All churches, regardless of their denominational affiliation, are understood by the faithful who worship there, to be safe places under the leadership of individuals who have been vetted and duly licensed by judicatory bodies. In denominations such as the Episcopal Church, in addition to the judicatory procedures,

⁴Ibid.

⁵Rudy Maxa, “The Boys from Brazil,” Penthouse, Dec. 1996, 42.

clergy are ultimately given their authority by the laying on of hands by a Bishop who confers priesthood through an unbroken line of apostolic succession. That laying on of hands gives that individual the responsibility "to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as pastor to the people; to share with the bishop in the overseeing of the Church; to proclaim the Gospel; to administer the sacraments; and to bless and declare pardon in the name of God."⁶ Thus, when that individual in the course of his ministry engages in sexual misconduct, the "breach of the trust . . . touches right to the heart of spirituality and faith."⁷

In her seminal work, Marie Fortune has made it clear that the real issue in all clergy sexual misconduct is "the misuse of power and authority."⁸ As a result, increasing attention is being paid to the whole issue of clergy leadership and ethical sexual behavior. Rediger, in his analysis of the problem, argues that the profound changes in both the cultural mores and the role of the ordained person have contributed to the rise of clergy sexual misconduct.⁹ Therefore, an analysis of the congregation in its contemporary cultural context, as well as an analysis of healthy clergy leadership models,

⁶The Book of Common Prayer (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 856.

⁷Parish Consultation Service, "The Congregation is Also a Victim: Sexual Abuse and the Violation of Pastoral Trust," in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 41.

⁸Marie M. Fortune, Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 101.

⁹Rediger, 113-15.

must become a concern of the institutional church across denominational lines. The specific problem addressed by this project, however, is the identification of a process which could be employed to rebuild and renew the life and faith of congregations which have experienced a betrayal of the pastoral trust through clergy sexual misconduct.

Thesis

This study will show that the resurrection of a congregation which has been devastated by the betrayal of the pastoral trust through clergy sexual misconduct is dependent upon the congregation's developing a clear understanding of healthy leadership models; appropriate boundaries and expectations; and open methods of decision making, conflict resolution and communication so that it can articulate a renewed sense of mission, revitalize its ministries, restore its financial base, and incorporate new members.

Thesis Argument

In the last ten years, a great deal of attention has been given to this whole issue of clergy sexual misconduct and clergy sexual ethics. Most of the work, however, has focused upon the role of the perpetrators; the reasons for their aberrant behavior; the primary victims, in terms of their vulnerability to the abuse; and the healing process for all concerned. Very little work has been done on the congregation, other than examining the healing process which has principally been dealt with in conjunction with the initial public disclosure process. In his Doctor of Ministry project, James Stein focused on the restoration of the pastoral trust through the ministry of the after pastor. The objective of

this project will be a study of the congregation through an exploration of the systemic issues in the life of the congregation. The purpose is to help us to understand why the misconduct took place, in some cases repeatedly, with a series of clergy perpetrators, so that a congregation can experience a rebirth through the development of healthy patterns of relationality.

The study will seek to examine healthy models of lay and clergy leadership and the way in which those healthy models can be implemented in congregations which have never experienced leadership of that type. Additionally, thought will be given to the way in which those healthy models can be supported and enhanced through program, teaching, preaching, and organizational structure so that the congregation can move into the future with a real sense of hope. Given the unique nature of clergy leadership, the study will pay particular attention to ways in which clergy should structure both their professional and personal lives in order to guard against the pitfalls which might lead to the betrayal of the pastoral trust through sexual misconduct. Attention will also be given to the role which the lay leadership of the congregation must undertake, and the responsibilities which are incumbent upon them, to insure that healthy models of pastoral ministry are embraced by their clergy leader. Finally, various pedagogical strategies for curriculum development will be explored in order to find one particularly suited to the revitalization of these traumatized congregations.

Method and Resources

The major focus of the study will be the congregation in which I am presently

serving as the after pastor and in which I am deeply involved in this process of renewal and revitalization. The approach of this project is to integrate an analysis of theological, psychological, and organizational studies and to utilize them in applying a case study methodology to the congregation in which I am serving as an after pastor. The case study approach is uniquely suited to the study of congregations which have experienced clergy sexual misconduct because they have the same dynamics as incested family systems. Since the issue is sexual abuse and the misuse of pastoral power, people are generally unwilling to acknowledge that what has transpired is inappropriate if they are even willing to admit that anything actually occurred. Typically, the victims either leave the congregation or find ways to deal with the shame which they feel.

Furthermore, since the perpetrator had the role of the patriarchal authority in the community and served as God's representative, the presumption is that what took place must have been all right. Even when conducting a case study from within the community, it is still difficult to gather the information necessary for the study. Because these congregations are characterized by a lack of open process, there is no record one can go to such as the minutes of meetings of the congregation's governing board.

Sufficient data can be amassed, however, by utilizing the case study method and analyzing the congregation as an emotional system through conversations with parishioners, participation in the life of the congregation, and the observation of how conflict is handled.

The goal of the study will be to propose a curriculum which can be utilized in this

and other congregations to effectuate new healthy patterns of relationality, which are imperative if these congregations are to experience the resurrection upon which all Christian hope is based. In the discussion of the betrayal of the pastoral trust through clergy sexual misconduct, this project will rely on the work of Marie Fortune, Peter Rutter, G. Lloyd Rediger, and the essays in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, edited by Nancy Myer Hopkins for The Alban Institute. Reference will be made to many of their insights and the results of their work in defining the terms and the precipitating problem on which this project focuses.

This project will approach the analysis of congregations which have experienced clergy sexual misconduct from a systems perspective. Central to that effort will be an analysis of the early work of E. Mansell Pattison, one of the first people to look at the parish church as a relational system. More than thirty years ago, Pattison clearly articulated the necessity for a clergy person to develop a system, separate from his congregation, composed of family, friends and colleagues through which his own personal, psychosocial, and intimate needs could be met.¹⁰ The analysis of both the role of the clergy person in a parish as well as the congregation in its contemporary context will be from a systems perspective. Systems theory is a method of discussing reality by analyzing the way in which different parts of a system are connected to one another. Therefore, thinking in systems terms causes us to explore how things interact, what affects them, and whether or not those actions are predicable in the sense of being

¹⁰ E. Mansell Pattison, Pastor and Parish: A Systems Approach (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 84.

repetitive or patterned.¹¹ The discussion of system theory will rely principally upon the work of Edwin Friedman, Peter Steinke, George Parsons and Speed B. Leas, and R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins. Their work will provide a basis for understanding the parish as a relationship system.

The insights from the aforementioned analyses will establish the specific objectives which will need to be established in order for healthy patterns of relationality to develop within the congregation. These objectives, in turn, will require the development of appropriate strategies which can then be employed to effect the revitalization of these congregations that have been victimized by clergy sexual misconduct. In developing an approach to curriculum development, the work of Ralph Tyler, Maria Harris, Donald Miller and Mary Elizabeth Moore will be explored.

Major Terms

The following is a list of the major terms which will be employed in this work:

After Pastor - A clergy person who serves in a congregation where a predecessor has engaged in sexual misconduct. In some cases the offending clergy person may not have been the immediate predecessor and in other cases there may have been more than one former clergy person who engaged in the betrayal of the pastoral trust. Characteristics needed by an after pastor include emotional resiliency, a knowledge of the congregation's history, and a complete understanding of the current precipitating

¹¹ Peter L. Steinke, How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems (Washington D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 3-6.

case. An after pastor should also have a support system, which includes a colleague who has had a similar experience and can fill the role of a mentor pastor; a solid relationship with a spiritual director; a therapist or psychological counselor, ideally one who is knowledgeable about natural systems theory; a judicatory official to serve as a resource; and the services of an attorney.¹²

Primary Victim - An individual or individuals “who is personally impacted in negative ways by inappropriate clergy sexual behavior and the misuse of the pastoral office.”¹³ Marie Fortune has described these persons as no longer feeling that the church is a place which is safe, that God has betrayed them personally; and therefore, no one can be trusted.¹⁴

Secondary Victim - In this study the secondary victim will be the term which is used to refer to the congregation where the clergy sexual misconduct has occurred. Although there has long been an understanding that secondary victims exist in incested families, the congregation has only recently been viewed in a similar manner. Both Marie Fortune and Nancy Myer Hopkins have helped us to understand that the victim is

¹²Nils C. Frieberg, "A Denominational Survival Kit for After Pastors," in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 36-37.

¹³Harold A. Hopkins, Jr., "Primary Elements in A 'Systems Approach' to Prevention and Response to Clergy Sexual Misbehavior," in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C. Alban Institute, 1993), 65.

¹⁴ Fortune, 109-11.

also the congregation.¹⁵ Congregations which have been traumatized by clergy sexual misconduct are incestuous systems which operate according to what Nancy Myer Hopkins has called "no talk, no feel rules. This means that people do not talk about their deepest questions. They do not know one another's stories."¹⁶ A select few parishioners know the congregation's secrets, which gives those people enormous power. Since no one wants to disturb the status quo, congregational life is characterized by periods of calm alternating with crises over irrelevant side issues. Clergy leadership is patriarchal and authoritarian while the lay leadership rotates among a select few. These congregations are socially closed systems where newcomers are subtly screened out; they are principally inward focusing with little outreach ministry; and they tend to be homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, and age.¹⁷

Pastoral Power - This term refers to the unique respect and position clergy enjoy due to their role as Christ's representative in the congregation as sacramentalists. Since the priest serves as Christ's representative in the people's midst, the priest serves as a sacred symbol, and as Thomas Groome has pointed out, "their 'aura of ultimacy' makes their formative and potentially transformative power second to none."¹⁸ E. Mansell

¹⁵Fortune, 112; and Nancy Myer Hopkins, "The Congregation is also a Victim: Sexual Abuse and the Violation of the Pastoral Trust" (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1992), 15-17.

¹⁶Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation," 21.

¹⁷Ibid., 21-24.

¹⁸Thomas H. Groome, Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 359.

Pattison, as early as the seventies, also wrote about the unique nature of the priest's role as a living symbol of the church, which in and of itself is a symbol system. Moreover, the priest's role, as the symbol of that divine parent, carries with it the expectancy of a higher degree of faithfulness and trust on the part of the clergy.¹⁹

Pastoral Trust - This term refers to the trust that clergy enjoy from their parishioners because of their role as Christ's representative. Because of that unique role, clergy are held to a higher level of trust than persons in secular leadership positions or even other professionals such as therapists, doctors, and teachers. It is also important to remember that, as Margo Maris and Nancy Hopkins have pointed out in their work with congregations where the betrayal of the pastoral trust has occurred, "there is a special bonding that occurs when pastors minister to families and individuals during the major milestones of their lives."²⁰ This bonding occurs because of the unique nature of the power an ordained person enjoys as the "pastor" to the people of a congregation. As Christ's representative the parish priest has the power to "function in powerfully formative ways to shape people's perspectives and commitments according to their ultimate view of existence."²¹

Sexual Misconduct - "Any physical contact or bodily movement intended to

¹⁹ Pattison, 53-56.

²⁰ Nancy Myer Hopkins and Margo E. Maris, "The Victim/Survivor," in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 54.

²¹ Groome, 359.

express or arouse erotic interest is sexual behavior.”²² Rutter adds, “suggestive speech also should be seen as sexual behavior.”²³ When these activities are engaged in by a clergy person in the company of a parishioner, they are sexual misconduct. “There is no such thing as consenting adults in such situations, even if the person who was abused felt differently about the contact at the time, and to some extent welcomed or initiated the contact.”²⁴ Clergy sexual misconduct typically occurs because the perpetrator is tantalized by the vulnerability of the parishioner; so he makes use of his unique role which “carries with it the charisma of mystical closeness to God.”²⁵ Therefore, Rediger argues, the clergy person's unique role as God's representative operates “by blinding the performer (priest) and the admiring observer (parishioner) to the realities of meaningful, responsible relationships.”²⁶

Congregation - Using Hopewell's definition of a congregation as “a group that possesses a special name and recognized members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practiced worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, outlook and story,”²⁷ this study will use a systems

²²Rutter, 40.

²³Ibid., 41.

²⁴Hopkins and Maris, 61.

²⁵Rediger, 16.

²⁶Ibid., 18.

²⁷James F. Hopewell, Congregation: Stories and Structures, ed. Barbara G. Wheeler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1987), 12-13.

approach to understanding congregational life. Clergy sexual misconduct is a systems problem which therefore requires a systems approach to deal with all aspects of it.²⁸ As this study will focus on the rebirth and renewal of these congregations; a systems approach to understanding the congregation as well as the role of the clergy, the lay leadership, and the parishioners will be required.

Homeostasis - This is the word used by family systems theorists to describe the status quo of a system. Edwin Friedman describes it as “the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence.”²⁹ Homeostasis is a way to describe the repetitive patterns in interpersonal interactions within an emotional relationship system when a system is balanced in the sense of being predictable.³⁰

Anxiety - Anxiety is generally understood to refer to a “painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill.”³¹ Family systems theorists use this word to describe the dynamic which is inherent, to some degree, in all relationship systems. There are two distinct types of anxiety: acute anxiety which is usually crisis generated and, thus, situational or time based; and chronic anxiety which is

²⁸Harold Hopkins, 73.

²⁹Edwin Friedman, Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 23.

³⁰Steinke, 6-13.

³¹“Anxiety,” Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

habitual and is, therefore, the normal state of being for that particular system.³²

Triangles - In any relationship system when members experience anxiety they will often attempt “to bind [their] . . . anxiety through the emotional process of triangling.”³³ This process of bringing a third person into the conflict as a go-between, allows for the emotional intensity to become diffused as the burden is shifted to another individual. Family systems theorists use the term “triangle” to describe the process which occurs “when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, [and] they . . . ‘triangle in’ or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another.”³⁴

Self-Differentiation - Self-differentiation refers to an individual’s ability to set goals, to establish boundaries, to accept responsibilities for one’s own actions, and the extent to which one will be responsible for others. Family systems theorists use this term to describe an individual’s “capacity to define his or her own life’s goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures. . . . It includes the capacity to maintain a (relatively) nonanxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one’s own destiny and emotional being. . . . The concept should not be confused . . . with autonomy or narcissism. . . . differentiation means the capacity to be

³²Steinke, 13-22.

³³Ibid, 47.

³⁴Friedman, Generation, 35.

an 'I' while remaining connected."³⁵ Steinke describes this as the ability "to be aware of one's self and the other's self at the same time. It means that we can be compassionate with other people without being engulfed or determined by them."³⁶

Curriculum - The definition of curriculum which is used in this study is one that is broader than the traditional understanding of this word, which has long meant resource materials of a variety of kinds as well as a specific course or series of courses designed to impart a certain body of knowledge. In this study, the term will be employed in the sense in which Maria Harris has used it in her description of curriculum as including all of the activities in which a church community engages, as well as the church community itself.³⁷ This is a definition which has particular relevance for the traumatized congregations on which this study is focused.

As we turn to an analysis of the congregation and the clergy leaders to whom God's people are entrusted, it is well to reflect on the prayer which every Episcopal priest says, while kneeling in the midst of the congregation, during the service of institution as rector of a parish.

O Lord my God, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; yet you have called your servant to stand in your house, and to serve at your altar. To you and to your service I devote myself, body, soul, and spirit. Fill my memory with the record of your mighty works; enlighten my understanding

³⁵Ibid., 27.

³⁶Steinke, 66.

³⁷Maria Harris, Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 170-74.

with the light of your Holy Spirit; and may all the desires of heart and will center in what you would have me do. Make me an instrument of your salvation for the people entrusted to my care, and grant that I may faithfully administer your holy Sacraments, and by my life and teaching set forth your true and living Word. Be always with me in carrying out the duties of my ministry. In prayer, quicken my devotion; in praises, heighten my love and gratitude; in preaching, give me readiness of thought and expression; and grant that, by the clearness and brightness of your holy Word, all the world may be drawn into your blessed kingdom. All this I ask for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.³⁸

³⁸Book of Common Prayer, 562-63.

CHAPTER 2

Characteristics of Congregations

The Congregation as a Community

One of the foundational premises upon which this work is based suggests that a congregation whose clergy leader has engaged in sexual misconduct is, in fact, a secondary victim of the abuse. Therefore, once the misconduct has been disclosed, the congregation has to continue its existence, in some fashion, in the same way that siblings or family members in an incested family have to reconstruct their lives even if they did not suffer the abuse directly. Thus, an examination of the congregation is an appropriate point of departure for our work. Since we are using as a foundational point of departure in our discussion of congregational life James Hopewell's definition of a congregation as "a group that possesses a special name and recognized members who assemble regularly to celebrate a more universally practiced worship but who communicate with each other sufficiently to develop intrinsic patterns of conduct, outlook and story,"¹ it is necessary to call attention to a peculiar distinction of Christian congregations. Because they are formed by persons who are seeking ways to fulfill the Gospel mandate of carrying on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world, it is impossible to be a solitary Christian outside the context of a Christian community. The very nature of the Christian lifestyle necessitates living in a larger community of persons who hold similar beliefs.

¹Hopewell, 13.

C. Ellis Nelson has referred to this concept as the “corporate nature of Christianity” and describes the Christian congregation as that sphere where the Christian story is transmitted from generation to generation through the unique lens of the contemporary context.² Nelson has also drawn our attention to the fact that a Christian congregation is, by its very nature, a diverse body of persons committed to the principle that their corporate activities will be determined by discerning God’s will for that specific experience which will characterize their life together.³ This then, Nelson argues, is what make Christian congregations “unique social institutions.”⁴ They are motivated by a commitment to comprehend and act upon their understanding of the will of their God, who is both in and of them, and yet also, wholly other.⁵ Therefore, since it is only through one’s lived experience that any individual comes to understand the life of the congregation with which they are affiliated, it is important to understand that “a healthy congregation, like a healthy family, is one that understands and tells its stories.”⁶ This vital characteristic of a healthy congregation is one we shall return to later in our discussion of the methodology for restoring life and vitality to congregations which have experienced a betrayal of the pastoral trust.

²C. Ellis Nelson, “Why This Book on Congregations,” in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transformed, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 6.

³Ibid., 3-5.

⁴Ibid., 7.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Hopewell, 193.

In his assumptions about congregations, Nelson also argues that it is possible for congregations to change.⁷ What is critical to that possibility for changing its corporate personality, is an understanding of the patterns of interpersonal interaction which impact a congregation's governance, its leadership, as well as its larger mission in the world.⁸ Thus, if our purpose is to explore ways of revitalizing and resurrecting congregations which have been devastated by the betrayal of the pastoral trust, then it is necessary for us to look at the congregation organically rather than contextually, mechanistically or symbolically.⁹

The Congregation as an Emotional System

More than twenty-five years ago Mansell Pattison began to think and write about the congregation as a system and its functions and interpersonal interactions in organic terms. He suggested that in our culture the church functioned as a series of what he called sub-systems. He described the functions of these sub-systems as proclaiming, symbolizing, moralizing, learning and growing, sustaining and maintaining, and repairing.¹⁰ It was through these various sub-systems he posited

that the church as a whole relates to the community. . .
the church is itself a subsystem of the larger community
system. It is not a closed system sufficient unto itself. It is
semipermeable, having connecting links both with the

⁷Nelson, "Why This Book," 11.

⁸Ibid., 7-11.

⁹Hopewell, 19-28.

¹⁰Pattison, 32-46.

lives of its individual members and—through its subsystems—
with the life of the community in which those lives are lived.¹¹

Today, building upon the work of Murray Bowen and Michael Kerr, Edwin Friedman and Peter Steinke have used family systems theory to provide us with a means of looking at congregational life from an organic systems perspective. Steinke contends that the church functions as an emotional system and that we need to stop talking and thinking in terms of a family metaphor and instead begin conceptualizing the congregation as an emotional unit.¹²

In a similar vein, the over-arching premise behind all of Edwin Friedman's work is his contention that it is necessary to reject what he calls the social science view of reality. He contends that the social science methodology analyzes reality by gathering information according to categories such as age, class, and gender because these are categories in which the social sciences have an interest. Friedman maintains, however, that this is a flawed premise upon which to base a view of reality. He suggests that those categories are not helpful and instead argues that it is necessary to view all reality from the perspective of emotional process. It is his conviction that all emotional processes are identical, regardless of which social science category you examine. Thus, the issue is not one of class, gender, or sex but rather of the interpersonal interactions which create the

¹¹Ibid., 47.

¹²Steinke, ix-xi.

emotional process in whatever system you are analyzing.¹³ Thinking in these terms allows us to look at how things and people react to one another and to assess whether there are patterns which are predictable in the sense of being “patterned or repeated.”¹⁴

The term which is used to describe these repetitive patterns in interpersonal interactions within an emotional relationship system is homeostasis. This is the condition which exists in a system when the various forces in that system are balanced in the sense of being predictable. In a family, for example, each member has their assigned role. It is only when one of those persons steps out of that role, that the family problems become visible through the actions of that non-role playing individual who is termed “the identified patient” in family systems theory. All relationship systems are dependent upon stability because people are generally uncomfortable with change or unpredictability in their interpersonal interactions. Since change, at least in terms of growth and development, is an inevitable part of any organic system; whenever it occurs, the homeostasis of the system is disturbed which causes the people in that system to become anxious. Therefore, anxiety to some degree, is inherent in all relationship systems and affects those systems.¹⁵

Anxiety impedes our ability to think clearly and causes us to react instinctively to

¹³Edwin Friedman, “Understanding the History, Culture and Future of a Congregation,” seminar presented at the Seabury Institute Summer Seminar, Evanston, Ill., 23-24 July 1996.

¹⁴Steinke, 6.

¹⁵Ibid., 6-13.

the changed situation in which we find ourselves. Two distinct types of anxiety can be found in individuals as well as in a relationship system. Acute anxiety is most usually crisis generated and, thus, situational or time based. For example, in a congregation, acute anxiety can be caused by budgetary problems or a change of clergy. Chronic anxiety, on the other hand, is habitual; it is the normal state of being for that system or individual. Acutely anxious people will eventually regain their perspective because they have the ability to control their reactivity. Chronically anxious people, on the other hand, do not have the capacity to self-regulate, and therefore are unable to regain their perspective. Because chronically anxious people are unimaginative and have little capacity for discernment, they reduce everything to all or nothing ultimata, impose their will on others, threaten to leave or quit, spread rumors, exaggerate circumstances and claim injustice in the system.¹⁶ Since these people do not have the ability to regulate their behavior, Friedman insists that they must be defeated or walled off.¹⁷

It is axiomatic that because the church stands for God's presence in the world, people who are practicing Christians expect more from the relationship system which is their church home. Since we are programmed to experience congregational life as harmonious and loving, anxiety within the relationship system of the congregation ultimately tests the core of the Christian credo.¹⁸ Thus, congregations often have

¹⁶Ibid., 13-22.

¹⁷Friedman, "Understanding the History."

¹⁸Steinke, 25; and Parish Consultation Service, 41.

difficulty in drawing appropriate boundaries and in making individuals accountable for their behavior. As a result,

religious institutions are the worst offenders at encouraging immaturity and irresponsibility. In church after church, some member is passively-aggressively holding the whole system hostage, and no one wants to fire him or force her to leave because it wouldn't be "the Christian thing to do." It has nothing to do with Christianity.¹⁹

What this tells us is that congregational systems have a low tolerance for anxiety. As a result, church conflicts may be far "more abusive than those that take place in less emotionally charged groups."²⁰ Often because of this discomfort with anything less than calm, loving togetherness, churches will almost always look for swift simple solutions or attempt to place the blame on one individual during periods of high anxiety or trauma.²¹ These behaviors are particularly significant in congregations which have experienced a betrayal of the pastoral trust.

Another result of the church's difficulty in dealing with chronic anxiety and its willingness to make people responsible for their own behavior is evidenced in the phenomenon that occurs when people shift their own personal chronic anxiety, if they cannot manage it themselves, "through the emotional process of triangling."²² Because chronically anxious people are unable to recognize their roles in the system, they lack the

¹⁹Steinke, 59.

²⁰Ibid., 25.

²¹Ibid., 62.

²²Ibid., 47.

resources to handle their own anxiety. Through this process of triangling, these chronically anxious people will merely shift the burden of their anxiety from themselves to another location, most usually another individual. Triangling never actually resolves the issue or even lessens the anxiety; it only serves to place the blame on another individual. The people who are the most likely to be triangulated in a relationship system are those who are the most responsible and those who are the most vulnerable.²³ Obviously, in congregations, the clergy and lay leadership are the principal recipients of this projected anxiety through this process of triangling. Therefore, unless the emotional process of the system is examined and understood; the triangles recognized; no rational process, clear thinking, or healthy decision making is possible, and therefore, no resolution can take place.²⁴

One other aspect of chronic anxiety which is important to our discussion is the issue of secrecy. Secrecy is a part of any sort of anxious blaming which happens in a relationship system. Secrecy is an example of reactivity, and secrets, in and of themselves, generate triangles. It is the act of engaging in the secret keeping and not the content of the secret which is damaging to the relationship system. In congregations, as in families, people are usually very reluctant to expose or confront secrecy.²⁵ Innately people seem to understand that the exposure of the secret will disturb the homeostasis of

²³Ibid., 49.

²⁴Ibid., 52.

²⁵Ibid., 89-90.

the system. Obviously, in a congregation where there has been a betrayal of the pastoral trust, once the disclosure has been made, the congregation becomes an acutely anxious system.²⁶ In many congregations, however, the historical pattern revealed when the disclosure of the betrayal of the pastoral trust has been made, reveals a system which has been chronically anxious for a long period of time. Friedman calls these chronically anxious congregations regressed and emotionally deadlocked systems. He describes them as having the following characteristics. They behave as if they are on a treadmill, constantly working harder and harder to solve the problem even though none of the strategies they employ appear to be working. Secondly, they keep seeking more and more data, consulting more and more experts in an effort to find the right answer rather than exploring the option of rephrasing the question or restating the problem they are trying to solve. Thirdly, emotionally deadlocked systems get polarized in false dichotomies which puts them into either-or thinking and keeps the focus on the content rather on than the process which is where the solution ultimately lies.²⁷

The Congregation as a Secondary Victim of Sexual Misconduct

Let us now turn to a consideration of the characteristics of a congregation which has been subjected to a betrayal of the pastoral trust because of the sexual misconduct of the clergy leader. Marie Fortune reminds us that we have traditionally used familial

²⁶Nancy Myer Hopkins, "Assessing Readiness for Congregational Intervention in Cases of Sexual Misconduct," in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 43.

²⁷Friedman, "Understanding the History."

images in describing congregational life. Since we have begun to deal with the reality of clergy sexual misconduct, however, we have come to recognize that this is a metaphor which has become problematic for us in several important ways. In the first place, viewing the clergy as an authoritarian parent figure carries with that role the idea of one who is not only the provider but also the ultimate authority.²⁸ In his discussion of the pastor as a symbol, Mansell Pattison suggests that this process of viewing the clergy leader in the parental role vests in that individual both omnipotence as well as omniscience which ipso facto makes that person trustworthy. Therefore, the parishioner, who is in the role of the child vis a vis the clergy parent, is willing to expose herself or himself and to become vulnerable in the same way a child would with a trusted parent.²⁹ Pattison also reminds us that the ministry is one of the historic professions where people feel an “inalienable right of access,”³⁰ just as they do in their family of origin. Furthermore, Fortune contends that in institutions like churches, which ostensibly have been created to serve human needs; authorized leaders are presumed to be trustworthy by virtue of the imprimatur of the institution. Thus, the institution’s credibility is, to a large extent, dependent upon the trustworthiness of its leaders since it has an acknowledged responsibility to protect the people it has been created to serve.³¹

²⁸Fortune, 103.

²⁹Pattison, 53-56.

³⁰Ibid., 54.

³¹Fortune, xiii-xiv.

In churches where there has been a betrayal of the pastoral trust, the congregation is usually unconscious or unaware that abuse by clergy is a fairly common phenomenon. Furthermore, the congregation does not fully understand and acknowledge the power which is implicitly vested in the ordained leader. Finally, because the model for the church's life is family, an environment is created which increases the possibility for incest occurring, given the right set of circumstances.³²

Nancy Myer Hopkins has done considerable work with congregations who have experienced the betrayal of the pastoral trust through sexual misconduct. She explains that these congregations are characterized by what she calls

no talk, no feel rules. . . people do not talk about their deepest questions. They do not know each other's stories, and while there may be a lot of chit-chat, there is little real communication. Confrontation is either avoided, or fighting takes place through symbolic and often trivial side issues.³³

Another general characteristic of these congregations is the fact that secret keeping is part of the social fabric of the congregation. These significant secrets are known to a select group and the knowledge of those secrets vests those individuals with enormous power. Interestingly enough, the in-group's loyalty to itself is so strong that those secrets are protected even though it might result in those individuals in the in-group experiencing "severe personal pain."³⁴ The other characteristic which Nancy Hopkins

³²Ibid., 99.

³³Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 21.

³⁴Ibid.

has identified in these severely traumatized congregations is the strong sense of denial. Typically there seems to be a prevailing idea that if the discomfort which is felt is ignored, it will somehow disappear. Therefore, a crisis atmosphere in the congregation tends to alternate with periods of calm. There is, however, no discussion of reality or what is really going on in the sense of what is bothering people because to engage in that discourse would inevitably disturb the status quo or homeostasis of the system.³⁵

In writing about these severely traumatized congregations, Hopkins has described them as socially closed systems and has made comparisons with an incested family system. In these congregations the members have a tendency to socialize principally among themselves and, in a dynamic prevalent in groups of teen-agers, people can only leave the congregation by becoming angry enough to leave. Furthermore, these congregations have what Nancy Hopkins calls “an over abundance of undifferentiated or over-dependent people who are attracted to a certain theology which provides ready answers to all of life’s problems.”³⁶ Thus, it is not surprising that the clergy leadership in these churches is authoritarian and patriarchal. The lay leadership, on the other hand, tends to be vested in a small number of persons who take turns serving in the various leadership positions. Since the congregation is very inward focusing in its orientation, there is very little interest in outreach ministries or for any sort of mission outside the

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 23.

congregation's own life.³⁷

Nancy Hopkins has also called attention to an attitude of superiority in these traumatized congregations which prevails against anyone who is not a member of the congregation. She has characterized this attitude as a "self-righteous 'we-they' mentality" and has described this exclusionary attitude as follows:

There is almost always an unwritten list of impediments to belonging, so that subtle and not-so-subtle gatekeeping screens out "undesirables." There is usually concern voiced that the clergy's ministry not extend overmuch to the world beyond the walls of the congregation, including that of the local community and the wider church.³⁸

This lack of interest outside the confines of the congregation extends to denominational activities and to exposing the congregation to guest preachers or outside influences.

These congregations also have an image of themselves as being a very warm, friendly and inviting church whereas, in reality, "newcomers often find a very cool reception, especially if they are considered not a good fit."³⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that the membership of these congregations tends to be very similar in terms of race, ethnicity, class and often even age. It is also very interesting that because the system is so closed to outsiders, these congregations have a view of themselves as being a very close family and yet what distinguishes these very closed churches is the fact that there is no real intimacy

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

at all between members.⁴⁰

Another fascinating aspect of these congregations is their spiritual orthodoxy and rigidity. These are not churches which can tolerate much in the way of diversity of belief and Hopkins has referred to them as “spiritually closed congregations.”⁴¹ She suggests that the spirituality engendered by the rigid worship and belief system in these congregations often becomes “an addictive process, used to medicate against feelings, and to avoid intimacy.”⁴² In these congregations, this peculiar spiritual rigidity or congregational orthodoxy is established through the strong patriarchal leadership of the clergy who often enjoy very long tenures. Having found a comfortable niche where they fit and have complete control of their environment, they are not inclined to leave these sinecures.⁴³ It is also interesting to note that the sermons of these clergy leaders are generally not biblically based and there is a strong tendency in their preaching to apologize if there is a scriptural basis for the sermon.⁴⁴

The leadership style of these clergy is characterized by a complete lack of what we would describe as open process, as the primary mode of interpersonal interaction with the congregation members is through the vehicle of manipulation. All conversations are

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 24.

⁴⁴Fortune, 8.

one on one private conversations in which the content is held to be privileged or confidential.⁴⁵ In addition, these clergy persons are usually loners by nature and do not look for collegial relationships with their fellow clerics. Typically, the only way a parishioner gains access to these individuals is through their secretary or through certain key lay people. These clergy attend to pastoral needs personally rather than setting up systems within the parish for the delivery of pastoral care by others. Through their personal ministrations to certain select individuals, they are able to succeed in making people feel incredibly grateful to them. This attitude and the intimacy of the pastoral relationship are then used to manipulate them.⁴⁶ Clergy who engage in sexual misconduct are also often charming, very bright and are particularly attracted to people who exhibit powerlessness and vulnerability. Because the typical clergy sex offender “is not psychotic, but is usually sociopathic; . . . he has little or no sense of conscience about his offending behaviors. He usually will minimize, lie, and deny [the offending behavior] when confronted.”⁴⁷

Undeniably, the role of the clergy person in any congregation is a powerful one. Thus, the betrayal of that pastoral trust is particularly devastating because that clergy person has been the one who has presided over the life passage events in the families of all of the members of the congregation. Obviously, in a congregation where the clergy

⁴⁵Stein, 34.

⁴⁶Fortune, 8.

⁴⁷Ibid., 47.

person has enjoyed a long tenure, the more traumatic that betrayal becomes for the parishioners.⁴⁸ Nancy Myer Hopkins has written concerning the power of the clergy role in the congregational dynamic as follows:

I believe that the embodiment of the Divine is a very powerful, yet largely unconscious and unacknowledged element in the dynamics of parish life. A spoken expectation, couched in typical Anglican vagueness, yet also conveying that sense of possessiveness that many clergy feel, is that the ordinand will be “a wholesome example to your people.” Many of us ask the cleric to be good so we do not have to be (as good).⁴⁹

Moreover, that power vested in the ordained person is enhanced by a variety of factors. For example, the liturgy provides that person with the role of representing Christ to that gathered congregation. The special clothing worn by that person, particularly in terms of the colors and design of the vestments, only serves to enhance that role and adds valence to that person’s power in the community. That elevated importance within the community is further supported by the special title that individual is accorded and, most of all, by the fact that he stands before that congregation on a weekly basis proclaiming the word of God through the vehicle of his preaching.⁵⁰ G. Lloyd Rediger has written about this dynamic and describes it as the star factor of the ordained clergy.

The term star describes the unique combination of being the identified spiritual leader of a congregation, a recognizable moral leader in the community, and a performer in the spotlight leading people in their liturgical worship of God . . . no other

⁴⁸Nancy Hopkins, “Congregation is also a Victim,” 13.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid., 14.

profession offers an individual the responsibility of standing in front of an audience at least once every week and interpreting God, life, and morality for them.⁵¹

He argues that this factor gives the clergy power, not only to control the significant events in people's lives, but also their very lives in terms of the moral suasion that the ordained position accords them.

This danger is heightened even more when one extrapolates from the power of the ordination vow the task of serving as the community's sacramentalist. Thus, it is not a great leap for these clergy who betray the pastoral trust, to see themselves as having God given power to make their own rules or, at the very least, select the rules by which they feel compelled to abide. Rediger's work is particularly important because, although much has been written about the characteristics of the star, his contribution has been to force the institutional church to acknowledge that "heightened sexual stimulation and the relaxing of controls, combined with the clergy's opportunities for privacy and intimate contact will inevitably produce the significant increase in sexual malpractice"⁵² we are experiencing.

Through her work with congregations which have experienced clergy sexual misconduct, Nancy Myer Hopkins has concluded that

sexual closure is the inevitable end result in a predictably developmental sequence, beginning with social and spiritual closure. . . . When the crossing of sexual boundaries occurs between professionals and church members. . . it may be more

⁵¹Rediger, 15.

⁵²Ibid., 18.

attributable to the special intensity that so seems to characterize closed religious systems, coupled with the unique dynamics inherent to the clerical role.⁵³

When a congregation is forced to confront the fact that sexual misconduct has occurred and they begin to recognize that there has been a betrayal of the pastoral trust there is a tendency to react in very predictable ways. Usually there is a grave sense of embarrassment and a sense that it is not a good idea to discuss the problem as it is rather like washing the family's dirty linen in public. There is always a strong sense of denial, which is most often expressed through a strong effort to blame the accusers, and a refusal to believe what are the rationally undeniable facts. This process of blaming the victims will frequently take the form of actual personal hostility. Other common behaviors which will be exhibited in a variety of ways are anger, grief, and depression. The anger may also be expressed at judicatories as well as individuals.⁵⁴ Nancy Myer Hopkins' work with congregations which have been traumatized in this way has been very helpful because she has made us realize that the grieving process is inevitable and cannot be ignored. Furthermore, she reminds us that people do not move through the grief process at the same pace.⁵⁵

Marie Fortune has asserted that if a congregation can be "a community of faith which can face itself, call one another to account, and be reconciled through a just

⁵³Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 24.

⁵⁴Fortune, 81-85; and Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 20.

⁵⁵Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 18-19.

response,”⁵⁶ it has the possibility for a viable future. Nancy Hopkins, however, argues that if the congregation is not recognized and acknowledged as a secondary victim of the misconduct, then you will not break the cycle of the systemic dysfunction which exists. What is vitally important in this recognition of the congregation as a secondary victim, is the need to plan for the congregation’s future with both intentionality and full knowledge of the congregation’s history. For it is only when you view the system “within a historical, cultural and social context . . . [that you can] see how the past affects the present.”⁵⁷ Thus, people must be told all the facts and a full disclosure must be made if healing is to occur and a healthy future is going to be possible. Otherwise, there will continue to be secrecy, denial, and anger; behaviors which are destructive to congregational life. Often these behaviors will surface through conflicts about all sorts of unrelated issues and at other times, they will manifest themselves in an unhealthy pattern of repressing conflict so that the togetherness of the congregation is not threatened.⁵⁸ Thus, the congregation’s history needs to be carefully reviewed for it is only through this kind of thorough self-reflection that a congregation can rebuild its congregational life along healthy patterns and renew its sense of mission as Christ’s people charged with the task of carrying on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the contemporary world.

⁵⁶Fortune, 97.

⁵⁷Nancy Hopkins, “Congregation is also a Victim,” 17.

⁵⁸Ibid., 41-42.

CHAPTER 3

The History of the Congregation

The First Twenty Years: The Builders

St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church was founded as a mission in 1946 as residential development began to boom in the San Fernando Valley following World War II. Parish status was granted in 1951 and the priest who had served as the mission vicar since its founding was elected as the first Rector.¹ This priest, who would later in his career become a bishop, is described by parishioners as having been a strong willed, patriarchal, authoritarian leader. Having a clear sense of the role of a parish church in a community, he worked to grow his fledgling parish in terms of members, financial resources, and physical plant. The first church building was a riding stable which the parishioners not only renovated and made into a sanctuary, but “they made all the furniture, pews, pulpit, prayer desk, altar hangings and light fixtures.”²

The people referred to the first Rector as “Father,” and under his leadership the congregation had a real sense of itself as a community of committed Christians who had been called together in this particular place at this particular time to do God’s work. That clarity of purpose is vividly conveyed in the following statement which was printed in a booklet in 1952.

Several years ago a Real Estate man sent our church a check and

¹Bettye Miller, “A History of St. Michael and All Angels’ Parish: 1946-1971,” Studio City, Calif., 1971, 6.

²Ibid., 4.

a note which read, 'It is remarkable what the great Architect of the Universe can do to a dirty old stable with the help of a few earthly Episcopalians.' God can do this through His people when they believe that His work is important. There were only a few then, there are more now, but when everyone connected with this Parish admits that God's work is important, then we can serve as we should, and as He expects us to do.³

From all accounts, St. Michael's was a typical church of the 50s with a burgeoning Sunday School; an active youth group; the men serving on the Vestry; and the women cooking, polishing silver and brass, holding rummage sales, and various other traditional fundraisers. People tell stories about the first Rector with great respect and admiration. The hallmark of most of those stories was the way in which he simply told people what they were supposed to do. Apparently, even the most assertive individuals followed his instructions or directions assuming that he not only knew what was best for the parish community but for themselves as well. One parishioner remembers having the Rector tell her that she was not quite yet mature enough to be a member of the Altar Guild. Moreover, he went on to add that he felt certain that if she continued to serve the parish in the ministries in which she was presently engaged, she would be ready for the Altar Guild in a year or two. Even though she had never had any interest in the Altar Guild ministry, either before or after the Rector's comments; she dutifully accepted his invitation to serve on the Altar Guild when he extended it several years later.⁴

The first Rector left in 1959 and the parish called its second Rector who served

³Ibid.

⁴Conversation with a parishioner, Spring 1994.

for the next seven years. From all accounts the second Rector was also a very strong willed, authoritarian, patriarchal leader; however, he was also a completely committed social activist who came to St. Michael's from service as a missionary in Brazil. He was unable to think in terms of ministry in less than a global way. Therefore, he led the parish into social justice ministry in which the parish had not been involved under the founding Rector. During his tenure as Rector he founded a counseling center, a thrift shop and a parish day school. The counseling center and the parish day school were both initially envisioned as community outreach ministries. The thrift shop, on the other hand, was begun as a means of generating income for the parish. By the time the parish leadership was writing the Parish Profile in 1992, all three of these enterprises would, however, be viewed as outreach ministries of the parish.⁵

Unlike their relationship to the first Rector, the congregation initially resisted the leadership of the second Rector, not because it was authoritarian or patriarchal in nature but because they profoundly disagreed with him on political grounds. The problem was exacerbated because he had a strong sense of what the parish's ministry ought to be. When the congregational leadership disagreed with him he simply forged ahead, imposing his will upon the congregational body. When these disagreements centered upon some activity which the Rector felt called to undertake personally, such as going to the South to participate in civil rights demonstrations, the opposition to his leadership was expressed through vocal criticism of the stands which he felt compelled to

⁵"St. Michael and All Angels' Parish Profile," Studio City, Calif., 1992, 6.

undertake. It did not, however, cause serious upheaval within the congregation.⁶

This was not the case with the founding of the parish day school, which engendered serious opposition from the beginning. When it became clear that a parish day school was going to be established regardless of the congregation's opposition, nine of the twelve members of the Vestry resigned and a large number of parishioners, some estimate as many as a third of the congregation, withdrew their membership over this issue.⁷ By 1966, the tension in the parish had escalated to such a level that the Rector decided to leave in order to resume his ministry as a missionary in South America. At this point the parish found itself twenty years old, badly bruised from the in-fighting, and considerably reduced in numbers of members from its heights in the late fifties and early sixties. By this time, however, the physical plant had been developed and a separate sanctuary, a parish hall, a church office building, a rectory, and Sunday school classrooms had all been completed.

The Long Pastorate: The Reconciler/Healer

It was into this environment that the third Rector of the parish arrived to take up the clergy leadership of this congregation in 1966. Although he was an American, he had been educated at Oxford and was considered to be an intellectual by the members of the

⁶Conversations with parishioners, 1994.

⁷Vestry Consultation with The Reverend Kathleen A. Dale, 3 and 24 Aug. 1996. The Vestry retained the services of The Reverend Dale to help them process the crisis which had occurred with the resignation of the three Vestry members in July. One part of that process was the telling of the congregation's story, which enabled the fourth Rector and the Vestry to learn parts of the Parish history which they had not previously known.

parish. Most of the people in the congregation who were there when he arrived agree that he was not particularly interested in becoming the third rector of St. Michael's. He was happily serving as the associate in a large and affluent parish in Los Angeles where he enjoyed his work which allowed him ample time to pursue his psychological studies. Ultimately, he became a Jungian therapist and the entire focus of his ministry at St. Michael's was seen through the lens of a therapist.

At the time of the meeting with the parish leadership to disclose the third Rector's sexual misconduct, a parishioner who was in the leadership at the time of his arrival, commented that he recalled the parish leadership agreed to pay him less than an appropriate rector's salary with the understanding that he would only be required to function as the parish priest part time and could use the remainder of his time to develop his therapy practice.⁸ According to the parish history as it is recounted by parishioners who are still members of the congregation, the Bishop convinced him to assume the rectorship of St. Michael's by persuading him that his skills as a reconciler and counselor were particularly needed at this stage of the parish's life due to all of the friction and conflict which had attended the last few years of the second Rector's tenure. The Bishop insisted that the parish was badly in need of a clergy leader who could come in and help the parish heal, as well as regain its self-confidence and sense of purpose.⁹

Initially, life in the parish went on in much the same way as it had for a number

⁸Conversations with parishioners, 1993.

⁹Comments at the meeting of the Vestry, the School Board, and the Counseling Center Board, 14 Dec. 1993.

of years but without the conflict and rancor of the last years of the second Rector's tenure. "During the year of 1970 twenty children and one adult were baptized, seventeen confirmed, nine couples married and there were eight burials."¹⁰ As the years went on, however, and the children grew up, went to college and moved away; very few new children replaced them in the Sunday school or youth group as very few new families joined the parish. There are people in the parish in their mid-thirties who remember the Church while they were growing up with virtually no other young people their age.¹¹ During the search process for the fourth Rector, the Search Committee showed candidates a graph of both the attendance and the parish income for the twenty-five years of the third Rector's tenure, which resembled a downhill ski slope.

It is important for us to pause in recounting the history of St. Michael's in order to explore some of the reasons for that decline in both its membership and its financial resources. One possible factor was suggested in an outside report commissioned by the Vestry in 1982 because of problems with the parish day school. The two outside consultants who wrote the report noted that parents of children in the school, who were not parishioners, described the parish as "stressing 'the individual rather than the community.' Several parents said that it was difficult to feel welcome in the church, and one said that it was a 'cold' parish."¹² This observation was accurate because it was

¹⁰ Bettye Miller, 10.

¹¹ Conversation with a parishioner.

¹² Jefferson C. Stephens, Jr. and Michael L. Grella, "Report on St. Michael and All Angels School," 26 April 1982, 7.

verified by a parishioner of some thirty-five years who served on the Host Team for a recent New Member Dinner. In complimenting the fourth Rector on the format and the way in which the New Member Dinner was conducted, he commented on the sense of warmth and welcome which he felt had permeated the entire evening. He went on to talk about how that very sense of warmth and welcome had been missing during the last Rector's tenure, suggesting that the lack of warmth and sense of genuine welcome may have been a factor in the parish's lack of growth during the preceding quarter of a century.¹³

Another factor which might have contributed to the gradual decline in parish membership during the twenty-five years of the third Rector's tenure, may also have occurred because visitors to St. Michael's encountered a closed family system. The 1992 Parish Profile is illuminating in this regard in the way it describes the parish: "the primary image members have of the Church is as a family community and a 'spiritual society.'"¹⁴ Although the parish had always described itself as a family, it had probably not stopped to consider the fact that one does not just join a family. People are adopted by families, either formally or informally, after it has been determined that there is a fit since families are not, by their very nature, radically inclusive entities. The image of the family is, in fact, an image which is very different from the radically inclusive groups which the Gospel calls Christians to form.

¹³Conversation during the New Member Dinner, 4 June 1996.

¹⁴"Parish Profile," 4.

The Rector's theology may also have been yet another factor which contributed to the steady decrease in parish membership. In the later years of his tenure at St. Michael's his theology was very unorthodox in comparison to what one might expect from the average Episcopal priest. It was heavily influenced by Eastern religion, Jungian psychology, and mysticism. Also, from references in his sermons, people in the congregation knew that he had visions in which the Virgin Mary regularly appeared to him. For example, a parishioner recently requested that a "canticle" be printed in her mother's funeral bulletin which the third Rector had received in a vision from the Virgin Mary. This "Canticle of Mary" had great meaning for her; thus, she wanted it on the cover of her mother's funeral bulletin.

In his work on congregations who have experienced a betrayal of the pastoral trust, James Stein observes that pastors who abuse their congregations have a way of presenting "the relational nature of faith in God as being uniquely understood and embodied in the person of the pastor. . . . [therefore] most [parishioners] feel fortunate to have such an insightful spiritual leader."¹⁵ Needless to say, having a rector who communicated regularly with the Virgin Mary may have added to his aura as a deeply spiritual and very special sort of person for some people, but it may also have been a factor in causing some people not to feel comfortable about affiliating themselves with the parish as members.

It is also important to note that the third Rector was a very strong introvert who

¹⁵Stein, 33.

carefully controlled the contact he had with the average parishioner. For example, he never attended the Sunday Morning Coffee Hour, parish fellowship functions, or parish committee meetings. One person who had been in the parish for forty years, and had served on the Vestry as a warden, had never been in the Rector's's office until the fourth Rector's tenure.¹⁶ People seemed to understand that the third Rector was not someone who should be expected to make hospital calls or to participate in the other mundane administrative activities of running a parish as the Rector and chief executive officer of the corporation. Early in her tenure, in 1993, the fourth Rector nearly killed a parishioner from shock. She was in the intensive care unit when the fourth Rector arrived to visit her. Knowing that no rector at St. Michael's for more than twenty-five years had made hospital visits, the parishioner naturally assumed she was dying and that the hospital personnel had summoned her priest. All of these factors contributed to the fact that the third Rector was regarded as a very special and spiritual man.

Another aspect of congregational life which was different from the beginning of the third Rector's tenure, was the fact that the parish, which had been very outer-directed in terms of its ministries, began to concentrate its ministries and attention upon itself and to focus inward. In the history which was written for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the parish, in addition to the Sunday School and Youth Group, the parish activities listed were an art auction, a Las Vegas night, a choir musical and tea, professional performances given by the parish theater group, the meetings of several bridge groups,

¹⁶Conversation with a parishioner, Lent 1993.

and the Rector's Bible Study and Lenten lectures. The only outreach ministry in which parishioners could become involved was a group which went "to the inner city once a month. . . .[to] cook a hot lunch for elderly people who live near by, and pay only 65 cents for a well balanced meal."¹⁷

The outreach ministries which had been started by the second Rector continued but with a decidedly different sense of what an outreach ministry was. In the first place, by the 1980s, both the counseling center and the parish day school were completely dependent upon professional personnel who were not otherwise connected to St. Michael's. There was no way that parishioners could be involved in these outreach ministries and have a sense of living into their Christian discipleship. The counseling center, for example, found it difficult to offer services to financially needy clients since it was located on the parish property in a fairly affluent part of the city. Therefore, people who had a need for low cost counseling would first of all have to have transportation to get to the counseling center in order to take advantage of the reduced fees. In the same way, the parish day school, which some people would tell you was started to assist single mothers in providing a safe place for their children, soon evolved into a fairly expensive private day school. Over the years the tuition increased to the point where many children in the parish could not afford to attend it. The 1982 report on the school noted that "many of those interviewed referred proudly to the broad socio-economic mix of the school families, when in fact, while there may be fairly wide variance in individual

¹⁷Bettye Miller, 12.

wealth, only nine families qualify for financial aid.”¹⁸ Thus, these two enterprises which had been founded by the second Rector as outreach ministries, had been transformed into quite different entities than they were at their inception. Servant ministry had been replaced by ministry which, in point of fact, sought to support the constituency, or at the very least the potential constituency, of the congregation itself.

An interesting juxtaposition is the case of the thrift shop, which began as a means of raising money for the parish. In the last years of the third Rector’s tenure, however, the thrift shop was regarded as an outreach ministry of the parish because it gave some of the older women an opportunity to sell used clothes to lower income people at a price they could afford. These women were proud of their efforts and considered them to be a ministry as they dispensed a good deal of advice and support to people along with the clothing they sold. Their relationships with these people were far more important to them than the \$5,000 per year in income that the Thrift Shop generated for the parish in the last years of its existence. The closing of the Thrift Shop was occasioned by the robbery, at gun point, of a woman working there. It turned out that not only was she not a member of the parish; she was, in fact, a former customer whom the women had mentored. Eventually, they had allowed her to work there. As all of the women were fairly elderly and could not participate in most of the current outreach ministries of the parish, the Thrift Shop enabled them to continue to help people, often by giving them clothes or a job working there.

¹⁸Stephens and Grella, 10.

The only other outreach ministry which existed during the third Rector's tenure was the congregation's participation in the founding of an interfaith food pantry. This, however, was due to the efforts of a priest who served as an assistant in the parish. This clergy person had a strong sense of Christian social activism and saw the congregation's involvement in activities such as the Interfaith Food Pantry as an important part of the life of any parish community. Thus, that strong sense of being Christ's hands and feet in the larger world outside the walls of the parish and doing God's work, which had been part of the vision of the parish from its earliest years, had been dramatically transformed during the twenty-five year tenure of the third Rector.

Possibly because of the conflict which attended the last part of the tenure of the second Rector, who was so closely identified with social justice ministry, the parish changed its principal focus from service to others, in the sense of servant ministry, to a focus on personal piety. This personal piety was not the feel good tranquility offered by so many of the mega evangelical churches, but rather a piety which was characterized by the "nourishment and expansion of the interior journey."¹⁹ The development of one's personal spirituality was seen as the objective or focus of the congregation; a fact that was clearly expressed in the 1992 "Parish Profile": "St. Michael's is looking for a rector who will foster a sense of community, supporting our desire to create a family which encourages the spiritual development of its members."²⁰

¹⁹"Parish Profile," 1.

²⁰Ibid., 16.

Also, the congregation's view of the third Rector as a model of spiritual development reflects another important aspect of the parish's life. By using the Rector as a model and by learning from his sermons and his Lenten lectures, an individual's spirituality could be developed. This, also, was clearly articulated in the 1992 "Parish Profile":

The primary image members have of the Church is as a family community and a "spiritual society." Many members are on a spiritual journey and have benefited from the example of our former rector who emphasized the importance of spiritual development and served as our model.²¹

As has been previously noted, his theology was quite unorthodox and he was actually regarded and referred to as a guru by some parishioners. In his work on congregations where there has been clergy misconduct, James Stein has noted that in most cases the personal theology of the abuser takes precedence over denominational orthodoxy.

After pastors almost uniformly attest to the fact that abusing pastors had become disconnected from the denomination with the result that a good number of members of the congregation have little interest or agreement with the theological traditions of the denomination.²²

Although members of the parish may be involved individually in denominational activities, the congregation tends to follow the abuser's lead in holding the

²¹Ibid., 4.

²²Stein 32-33.

“denomination. . .in low regard.”²³ In the first year of the fourth Rector’s tenure, it was an adjustment for the few members of the congregation who had remained actively involved in Diocesan affairs to get used to having a rector who was not only involved in Diocesan activities in her own right, but who also attended and participated in all diocesan meetings. If people questioned the parish’s lack of orthodoxy or the lack of denominational traditions such as youth confirmation classes, they were, in some cases, actually encouraged to join other parishes by the third Rector.²⁴

The lack of traditional program ministry was dramatically reflected in the 1992 "Parish Profile" in the way in which future physical plant needs were described:

Future needs of the Parish plant include additional facilities for the Day School and the Counseling Center. . . a new building for Church offices, Counseling Center consultation rooms and vastly improved junior high school facilities will be built The old rectory on this site, now used by the junior high, will be razed to make way for the new facilities. The Parish offices will also move to the new building. The Day School will then make use of the present Parish offices.²⁵

Not only was there no sense that any improvements were necessary in the physical plant relative to its use by the worship ministry of the church, but there was also no mention of any expansion of any kind that was anticipated in the program ministry of the church which might necessitate additional facilities to accommodate these ventures. Noticeably, the only space which the worship ministry of the church was perceived to need at this

²³Ibid., 33.

²⁴Conversation with a parishioner, 1993.

²⁵"Parish Profile," 12.

junction of the parish's life, was new offices which would have resulted in moving the church offices to a remote corner of the property. This was probably due to the fact that the church offices were used, almost exclusively, by the Rector, who conducted his private psychotherapy practice from the Rector's office. During the first few months of her tenure, the Director of Religious Education, who had been hired by an assistant, asked the third Rector to see a family who was in crisis. Once he had established that they could not afford to pay his counseling fees, he referred them to the Counseling Center.²⁶

It is probably important to note that each of the first two rectors had fairly typical family situations. Each of them was married and had children. In the case of both of these men, their wives and children were actively involved in the life in the parish during their tenures. The third Rector, on the other hand, was also married but he and his wife did not have children. Although his wife attended the Sunday services, she was for the most part not involved in any way in the life of the parish community. In fact, very few people felt that they knew her at all. Both of the first two rectors lived on the church property in the Rectory. Several years after he assumed the rectorship, the third Rector and his wife left the rectory and moved back to the part of Los Angeles where they had lived during the Rector's last cure. Once they had moved over the hill, so to speak, the parish saw very little of the Rector's wife.

²⁶Conversation with a parishioner, 1994.

The Last Five Years: The After Pastor

After nearly a year of saying good-bye, which included a multiplicity of farewell events, the third Rector finally ended his quarter of a century tenure at St. Michael's on the last Sunday in January 1992.²⁷ The annual Parish Meeting was held on the following Sunday, and on the very next Sunday a Diocesan Consultant was present to conduct a parish meeting which would officially begin the search process that would ultimately lead to the election of the parish's fourth Rector. Within ten months that search process would be completed, as the fourth Rector was elected unanimously on the second Saturday in December and began her tenure a month later in January of 1993.

Even though the Diocese would later admit that there had been allegations of the third Rector's sexual misconduct, because the individual who had made the allegations was not ready to press charges, the Diocese did not attempt to convince the parish of the advisability of delaying their search process and to consider having an interim priest. This would have given the parish an opportunity to reassess who they were as a community after nearly fifty years of ministry and an exceptionally long last pastorate. An interim would also have given them a chance to experience other ways of being the church besides the way in which they had functioned for the last quarter of a century. It is difficult to understand why the Diocese did not exert more pressure for the parish to engage an interim clergy person, since they knew about the alleged sexual

²⁷Conversation with a parishioner, 1994.

misconduct of the third Rector,²⁸ and theoretically understood the importance of an interim ministry in parishes such as St. Michael's, where, in and of itself, the long pastorate alone would have dictated such an approach.²⁹ According to Peter Steinke:

Regardless of the means of the pastor's exodus -- replacement, retirement, forced resignation, or death -- there is a separation anxiety. Not resolved or managed, the anxiety turns into rejection of the new pastor, withdrawal from the family, or fervid attempts to fuse with the newly assigned or called pastor.³⁰

Therefore, if some process is not provided for the congregation to grieve the loss of their clergy leader, this unworked grief in the parish will only surface later in behaviors which can seriously threaten the health of the congregation as well as that of the lay and clergy leadership.³¹ In cases where the departure is occasioned by sexual misconduct, this danger is even greater as many members of the congregation will continue to view the abuser as their beloved pastor who has been wrongfully accused. The power of this unworked grief can be seen in such examples as the Altar Guild member who recently told the Altar Guild Director she would not be present on the day the Bishop came because she did not approve of the way in which he had handled the

²⁸Conversation with The Right Reverend Frederick H. Borsch, Jr., Ph.D., 14 Sept. 1993. The Bishop told the fourth Rector that he had known about the alleged misconduct since the fall of 1992 but the victim had only now, a year later, decided to press charges.

²⁹According to the parishioners, the Archdeacon who served as the Diocesan Search Consultant told the Search Committee that the Rector they called would probably only last five years since the individual would be following a twenty-five year pastorate.

³⁰Steinke, 38.

³¹Ibid.

sexual misconduct of the third Rector. She went on to explain that the purpose behind his suspension from the priesthood was to discredit him and to enhance his successor's tenure.³² Not only does James Stein argue strenuously for the necessity of an interim which he describes as a vitally needed time out in the life of the congregation, but he also feels that this interim period needs to be eighteen months to two years at a minimum.³³ Furthermore, he lists as the major objective of this time out period with a clergy leader who everyone understands will not hold that position permanently, as an opportunity for the congregation to "develop a positive self- image, [and to] recapture and rediscover its innate strengths."³⁴

Less than three months after her formal institution as the fourth Rector, during a conversation on another matter, a diocesan official informed her that the Diocese suspected that she might be an after pastor. Having attended a workshop with Marie Fortune while in seminary, she understood the term, and inquired as to whether any formal charges had been brought. She was told that arrangements for a meeting between the Bishop and her predecessor were presently being arranged. Less than a month later, following a meeting which they both attended, the Bishop asked to speak with the fourth Rector. At that time he informed her that he would be meeting with her predecessor in a few weeks to confront him with the allegations which had been brought by a former

³²Conversation between parishioners, Sept. 1996.

³³Stein, 61.

³⁴Ibid.

parishioner. He stated that he was fairly certain that the third Rector would not deny the charges and that if that were the case, his assistant, the Canon to the Ordinary, would be in touch with her to set up the procedures which would need to be taken to make the formal disclosure to the parish.

That meeting between the third Rector and the Bishop took place in late October, 1993 and the fourth Rector, the Junior Warden and the parish day school Headmaster met with the Canon to the Ordinary in early November to hear the report of that meeting and to make plans for the public disclosure which needed to be undertaken. At that time, the Diocese was in the midst of what would be six suspensions from the priesthood within a five-month period and, frankly, was reeling from the process. Even though the Diocese insisted that St. Michael's follow a prescribed process in making the public disclosure of the third Rector's sexual misconduct, there was very little formal support from the Diocese, in terms of either personnel or financial assistance. St. Michael's was essentially left to fend for itself in hiring a therapist facilitator to conduct the public disclosure meeting, a therapist to meet with parishioners immediately affected by the announcement of the betrayal of the pastoral trust, a consultant to handle the public relations, and legal assistance to handle the rash of lawsuits and threats of suits which followed.

Following the procedure outlined by the Diocese, the fourth Rector and the Wardens called a meeting of the Vestry, the Board of Directors of the Counseling Center, and the School Board at which the Canon to the Ordinary (on behalf of the Bishop)

officially informed the leadership of the parish community that the third Rector had signed a confession admitting sexual misconduct with eight parishioners and some three dozen prostitutes with whom he had a special ministry.³⁵ A week later a public meeting was held at which time the Bishop officially informed the parish community of the sexual misconduct which had occurred. The fourth Rector arranged to have the meeting chaired by a consultant therapist who had experience in facilitating meetings of this type. She also made arrangements for a therapist to be present who was acknowledged to be available, at no cost to individuals, to meet with any parishioners who had issues raised by the disclosure.

Prior to the public disclosure meeting, however, the third Rector sent a letter to persons in the congregations whom he deemed to be his supporters and recanted his previous signed confession. David Brubaker discusses this phenomenon which is apparently fairly typical in these situations. In many cases of clergy sexual misconduct, after the abuser has confessed there is often a withdrawal from that confession to a position which might be described as a kind of partial acknowledgment or a rationalization of the behavior. What results from these recantations, in whatever form they take, is that many people who cannot accept the misconduct on the part of the beloved figure of their clergy leader will begin to blame the victims.³⁶ In the case of St.

³⁵Meeting with The Reverend Canon Anne Sutherland Howard, 7 Dec. 1993.

³⁶David R. Brubaker, "Finding Hope for the Victims, the Offender, and the Congregation. . . in Cases of Clergy Sexual Abuse or Misconduct" in Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective, ed. Nancy Myer Hopkins (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 30.

Michael's, because the congregation had lost so many members over the years, the victim who initially brought the charges to the Diocese was no longer a member of the congregation nor were several other persons who subsequently acknowledged their abuse by the third Rector. On the other hand, a person who was a current parishioner did publicly describe the therapeutic process to which she consensually submitted as a form of therapy. Even though it involved nudity on her part, she explained that as it was part of her therapy even now in retrospect, she did not view it as inappropriate conduct on the part of the third Rector.

Since there were no victims within the congregation who had to be dealt with immediately, the congregation drifted from the disclosure on December 14th right into the Christmas holidays with very little outward discussion of the bombshell which had just been lobbed into the heart of the congregation. Thus, what occurred was precisely what Nancy Myer Hopkins has described.

Church officials must understand the depth of pain and trauma this period of uncertainty causes, and realize that most likely there will be great polarization between those who believe the story, and those who don't. . . . The natural desire of most people is to put all the unpleasantness behind as soon as possible. Many people will be uncomfortable with resurrecting old pain, or breaking the norm of keeping the secret.³⁷

There was a considerable group within the congregation who were of the "let's move on and not talk about it" school, either because they were in denial³⁸ or because they were

³⁷Nancy Hopkins, "Assessing Readiness," 44.

³⁸One parishioner expressed this sentiment when she discovered that her daughter had written a letter to the fourth Rector and the Bishop stating that she too, had been a

new to the congregation and had no idea who the third Rector was. Others just wanted to move on, celebrate Christmas and the new year and not talk about it. Still others, who knew even more than what had been publicly disclosed, preferred to continue keeping the secrets they had kept for years.³⁹

Before long, however, new victims surfaced in letters to the fourth Rector and the Diocese. Several threatened lawsuits including one former assistant's wife who threatened to sue the present Vestry and fourth Rector for not preventing the misconduct of the third Rector. Although masked by the holiday festivities, and then incredibly exacerbated by the Northridge earthquake which soon followed, there was a definite polarization of the congregation into those who believed that it had in fact happened and those who did not.⁴⁰ One couple no longer deals with a widow they have known for over thirty years because the widow's adult daughter described how she had been sexually abused by the third Rector at the public disclosure meeting. The couple prefer to believe that "she has always been a very troubled young woman" and that the allegations were obviously a fiction she had created.

teen-age victim of the third Rector. Her mother did not want to know what had happened and was angry that her daughter, now in her forties, was raising the issue.

³⁹A parishioner shared with me that a former parishioner, who had long since moved away, telephoned her upon hearing of the sexual misconduct disclosure of the third Rector. She confessed that she also had been a victim but that she did not want to make that knowledge public; she preferred to continue trying to forget that it had ever happened.

⁴⁰ See a discussion of this type of behavior in Nancy Hopkins, "Assessing Readiness," 44.

Four weeks after the public disclosure, on the first anniversary of the fourth Rector's institution, the San Fernando Valley experienced the massive Northridge earthquake which affected every family in the parish. No one was left untouched. The devastation ranged from one parishioner's home sliding into the canyon behind it; to a woman who was unable to return to her home for three years; and two young mothers who took their children, left their husbands and flew east to stay with their families. Fortunately, there were no deaths due to the earthquake but the pastoral care issues which surfaced were horrendous. Needless to say, it was a very easy thing to push the third Rector's confessed sexual misconduct into the background as there were more pressing and relevant issues which were part of the aftermath of the earthquake with which the parish needed to concern itself.

It should also be noted that at this time the fourth Rector did not have an assistant. During the search process the Search Committee had been very up-front in informing the candidates that although the parish had an assistant to the Rector in the past, a decision had been made to hire a business manager to handle the affairs of the church, the parish day school and counseling center. Thus, the new rector would not be able to hire an assistant until the parish had been rebuilt in terms of membership and finances and could, therefore, support the second clergy position. Thus, the pressure of the pastoral care needs which followed both the sexual misconduct disclosure and the earthquake fell on the shoulders of the fourth Rector. Because of all of these extenuating circumstances, St. Michael's was given ample excuses for rationalizing the way in which

they embraced the short-cut Steinke describes which is so attractive to parishes who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct. Because they were so eager to put their difficulties behind them, they focused completely on immediate and short terms concerns and gave very little thought to the fact that what was needed was leadership which would demand that they take sufficient time to process and reflect on what had happened so they could have a long-term focus.⁴¹

Once the disclosure had been made the Diocese seemed to forget about St. Michael's. There was no immediate assistance from the Diocese, either for the fourth Rector or the lay leadership in terms of what the clergy and lay leadership were going to have to do in order to effect recovery in the congregation. It was not until September 1994, nearly one year later, that the Diocese invited a group of clergy who were in seriously conflicted congregations where misconduct had occurred to participate in a group with a family systems therapist who was also an Episcopal priest. This group and the work which came out of it for the fourth Rector, and the therapist's subsequent work as a consultant with the lay leadership, has been the most helpful factor in trying to resurrect the congregational polity of St. Michael and All Angels' Episcopal Church.

The lack of leadership from the Diocese in helping congregations to recover from the sexual misconduct disclosure and move forward, may be explained by their lack of understanding of the dynamics which are involved. A quick perusal of the bibliography of this work will illustrate, for example, that the work of Nancy Myer Hopkins, Peter

⁴¹See Steinke's discussion of this phenomenon, 100.

Steinke and James Stein was only being published in 1992 and 1993 which was, in fact, the same time that the misconduct at St. Michael's was being publicly disclosed and beginning to be confronted. Even though the fourth Rector was a late vocation who had been introduced to family systems therapy as well as the work of both Edwin Friedman and Marie Fortune while in seminary, she was still unprepared and needed both support and direction in order to confront all the problems which would ensue.

The most insidious aspect of clergy sexual misconduct is the fact that it is so difficult to accept the reality that it is indeed a systems problem and that it can, therefore, only be dealt with from a systems perspective.⁴² Because there has been such a focus upon dealing with the primary victims, avoiding litigation, and providing care for the perpetrator; very little thought has been given to the way in which the congregation is supposed to go on with its corporate life after the public disclosure has been made. The Diocese of Los Angeles, like most judicatories, has not given sufficient thought to the way in which these congregations are supposed to try to resurrect themselves after what has often been years of systemic problems in the relationship system of the congregation. Harold Hopkins lists the resources which he considers to be absolute necessities for congregations who experience clergy sexual abuse: lay education on the issue; trained consultants and leaders, support for the Wardens and Vestry, support for the After Pastor, access to legal advice, pastoral support for victims, and assistance with handling the

⁴²Harold Hopkins, 65.

publicity which may ensue.⁴³

Although the Diocese has provided financial support for two years for clergy through the group previously described, no funds have been available for trained therapists to work with individual congregational leadership groups – something that is vitally needed for these congregations to be revitalized. Unless we can begin to think in terms of the congregation itself as a secondary victim in the same way that secondary victims are recognized in incested families, we will not see rebirth and revitalization in these traumatized congregations.⁴⁴ That is the reason why a systems approach to analyzing and planning for the congregation's future is so important. As Parsons and Leas have noted:

A systems approach to organizational problems does not deny that difficulties can be caused by individuals and/or by problems the organization needs to address, but it also observes the reactive patterns or nonconscious agreements or “understandings” that people have about how they are supposed to act or how to get along.⁴⁵

What is particularly important about this systems approach vis a vis a congregation which has experienced the betrayal of a pastoral trust and particularly one like St. Michael's where the abuser had a twenty-five year pastorate, is the recognition of the force that systems theorists refer to as homeostasis which was previously discussed. This is a phenomenon which occurs in systems which describes the inclination people have

⁴³Ibid., 71-72.

⁴⁴Fortune, 103-12.

⁴⁵George Parsons and Speed B. Leas, Understanding Your Congregation as a System (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 5.

when they are in relationships with others to develop specific ways of doing things. Usually, once these traditional methods of doing things have been put into place, particularly in churches, people continue to operate in these patterns without analyzing why. Therefore, when anyone new enters the system, the systemic forces work to ensure that the newcomer will adapt to the pattern of the system. "Homeostasis is the tendency for a system, relationship, or organization to mold the behavior of others into predictable patterns, making it possible for us to 'get along,' to do work, to find safety, to trust"⁴⁶ Nancy Myer Hopkins' work in this area is invaluable as a road map for congregations who are prepared to admit that they too have been victimized and are ready to deal with their problems from a systemic perspective. She reminds us continually in her work that "challenging the unhealthy norms [or homeostasis] of a system is a tricky business."⁴⁷ If new life and revitalization is going to occur, however, it is a necessity.

Nancy Hopkins lists the following elements which she sees as essential to planning the future of a congregation which has been traumatized by the betrayal of the pastoral trust. First of all there must be truth telling and this must involve actually teaching about the nature of sexual dependency, its causes, the warning signs to be aware of, and the impact that it has on family members, as well as the congregation itself. Secondly, pastoral care must be made available for parishioners who have related issues in their lives which always surface as a result of pastoral abuse in a congregation.

⁴⁶Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 22.

Mechanisms need to be provided for surfacing and validating the feelings of various members of the congregation; people need to be worked with at the point where they are in their ability to absorb what has happened to the congregation. Teaching about the congregation as a system is crucial so that the leadership can fully understand the way in which a congregation resembles a family and ways in which is decidedly does not. This is also the reason why the use of the metaphor of community rather than family is a much more appropriate one for congregations who have experienced abuse. Another factor which is also essential but which is often overlooked, is teaching about the grief process which can be handled in a number of ways. Finally, it is important to find an opportunity to do a congregational history which celebrates its saints and the strengths of the congregation's past as well as its sins and its suffering. For only by making a connection between what has happened in the past with the congregation's potential future as Easter people, for whom new life is always possible, will resurrection in the life of these congregations ever occur.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Parish Consultation Service, 41-42.

CHAPTER 4

Congregational Leadership

Leadership in the Wake of the Betrayal of the Pastoral Trust

Marie Fortune has delineated a number of specific acts which are required to restore what she refers to as right relations within a congregation which has experienced the betrayal of the pastoral trust. They include truth telling, acknowledging the violation in naming the sin, exhibiting compassion to all parties, protecting the vulnerable, holding people accountable, making restitution where necessary, and securing vindication.¹ Once these tasks have been undertaken through the vehicle of the public disclosure and assistance for the persons involved as the primary victims as well as the abuser, the time comes when it is necessary to begin to deal with the congregation itself and to plan for its future.

In the earlier discussion of congregations which have experienced the betrayal of the pastoral trust, we have described the homeostatic forces which are factors in creating the type of congregational environment which not only allows clergy misconduct to occur but often enables it to go undetected for long periods of time. We shall now turn our attention to a discussion of the type of leadership which is necessary in order to establish healthy relationships within the congregation which will allow for growth and change. As Parsons and Leas have noted in their work on congregations,

an organization cannot grow if the homeostatic forces

¹Fortune, 114-18.

are totally in charge. Growth means that the system must accommodate newcomers, new patterns must develop as numbers increase, new adaptations must be made to changing environments, new agreements must be made as new personalities enter the system.²

Perhaps the most significant new personality to be accommodated into the system of a congregation which has experienced betrayal of pastoral trust is the new clergy leader. More than twenty-five years ago, Mansell Pattison described seven distinct functions which the pastor as leader must fulfill. If these functions are performed well by the pastor, the congregational system will not only function well but it will also accommodate growth. The first function the pastor has is the symbolizing function which affirms the system's identity and reminds it of its charge. Secondly, the pastor has a being function which serves to affirm the individuals in the system as unique human beings; not as perfect models but as individual parts of an interdependent whole. Thirdly, there is the sharing function wherein the clergy leader shares not only the star role of the ordained leader but also the responsibility and authority inherent in that role. Fourth, the pastor has an intentionality function in acting intentionally but not reactively nor passively. Fifth, the pastor has a risk-taking function and models a willingness to experience the new and unknown without fear of failure. Sixth, the pastor has a limit setting function through which he or she establishes boundaries of acceptable action which reinforce appropriate behavior. Finally, the pastor has a catalytic or enabling function in which he or she undertakes the tasks of serving as the connector, mediator,

²Parsons and Leas, 7.

facilitator or enabler.³ “The pastor’s functions enable the system to be healthy, growing, and full of love. The system in turn then becomes the vehicle for the health and growth of its individual members.”⁴ What Pattison has described is the ideal. In the case of the sexually abused congregation all of these functions still need to be performed by the clergy leader; moreover, the clergy leader also has to deal with the added trauma of serving in the role of the after pastor.

The After Pastor: A Unique Leadership Challenge

An after pastor is defined by Nancy Myer Hopkins as any clergy person who follows the pastorate of someone who was involved in “sexual misconduct, or engaged in extreme behavior, such as embezzlement or other illegal activity. Sometimes the traumatizing event is quite far in the past, but the degree of pain and dysfunction in such congregations suggests that time alone does not heal the wounds.”⁵ This was certainly the case at St. Michael’s as the patterns of dysfunction, in what Friedman would describe as a chronically anxious regressed congregation,⁶ continued to trouble the congregation well beyond the time of the misconduct itself. Because these repetitive reactionary patterns lead to conflicts on all sorts of tangential issues, after pastors need to be emotionally resilient individuals who must know the history of the community, the facts

³Pattison, 62-69.

⁴Ibid., 69.

⁵Nancy Hopkins, "Congregation is also a Victim," 2.

⁶Friedman, "Understanding the History."

of the current case, as well as the emotional status of the congregation.⁷

At St. Michael's it was difficult to uncover the history while at the same time trying to get the Diocese to reveal the facts of the case. Because of the litigious nature of the society in which we live, judicatories are usually very reluctant to divulge information even to after pastors. Thus, meeting some of these requirements which are recommended is often impossible. The fourth Rector and the Wardens, for example, never knew who brought the charges against the third Rector or who the persons were with whom he had confessed misconduct. The Diocese simply refused to disclose this information for fear of legal actions which might result.⁸

The universality of the painful experiences of after pastors has been affirmed in the congregations studied by the Parish Consultation Service. Also, James Stein in his dissertation has pointed out that pastors with a heightened need to be loved by all members of the congregation will not be comfortable in congregations where there has been a betrayal of the pastoral trust and will, therefore, find it very difficult, if not impossible to function as an after pastor.⁹ In her discussion of the data assembled by the Parish Consultation Service, Nancy Myer Hopkins confirmed Stein's observation, noting that very often these clergy feel a frantic need to get out once they recognize that they will not be able to solve the problems they have inherited which resulted from the

⁷Friberg, 36-37.

⁸Meeting with The Reverend Canon Anne Sutherland Howard, 22 Nov. 1993.

⁹Stein, 71.

misconduct.¹⁰ This is especially true for clergy who have no idea that clergy misconduct has occurred and that they will be called upon to undertake this role of serving as an after pastor. The Parish Consultation Study also observed that in some congregations the after pastors never enjoy a “‘honeymoon phase,’ [of the relationship as the parishioners] . . . move right to a hostile, negative projection phase which is reported by many successor clergy to be of stunning magnitude.”¹¹

There is no way to explain how incredibly difficult it is to be the recipient of anger which has nothing to do with you or your ministry personally but rather merely with the position of clergy leadership that you hold. Stein describes the ways in which parishioners “will act out their anger . . . in hurtful and personal ways,”¹² and argues that the after pastor must not take these actions personally as she continues to work to develop healthy patterns of leadership, to raise up new leaders, and to help people claim their ministry. The reason that this is so much more difficult than it appears, is because it is quite one thing intellectually to understand what is happening, however, living with that reality is quite another matter.

In addition, the larger church community often gives insufficient support for the clergy person who is serving in this after pastor role.¹³ For example, the Diocese of Los

¹⁰Nancy Hopkins, “Congregation is also a Victim,” 5.

¹¹Ibid., 12.

¹²Stein, 28.

¹³Nancy Hopkins, “Congregation is also a Victim,” 6-7.

Angeles understood the need and funded a support group for clergy serving as after pastors to enable them to work with a therapist trained in family systems therapy who is also an Episcopal priest. Unfortunately, the Diocese lacked an understanding of the length of time that it takes a congregational system to move into healthy interpersonal behavior patterns upon which change in the system is ultimately predicated. After two years the Diocese decided that the services of the therapist would no longer be provided to the group in which the fourth Rector participated and would instead be offered to a new group of priests. The fourth Rector's group decided to continue working with the therapist, however, at their own expense because they recognized that the leadership which is demanded of them as after pastors is not only unique but also very difficult and something we still know very little about since the literature is only now beginning to emerge. Working with a therapist, in what family systems therapy refers to as the coach's role, is what makes it possible for clergy to change their behaviors so that they can live into that role of being the non-anxious presence whose goal is to lead through self-differentiation and not by over-reacting or over-functioning.¹⁴

In reality, the role of the after pastor is actually similar to that of a foster parent. This is a compelling image which Stein has used in criticizing the tendency that we have to talk in terms of the relationship between the clergy person and the congregation as being similar to a marriage. In the case of the after pastor and the abused congregation, the image of the foster parent role is infinitely more useful. It helps to dispel the illusion

¹⁴Friedman, Generation, 208-12.

that there will be anything about this relationship which will be normal, since the necessity for a foster parent is predicated, first and foremost, upon the absence of normality or health in the existing situation in the first place. Secondly, the foster parent image underscores the fact that this is a temporary role and not one that is envisioned to be permanent.¹⁵ This does not mean, as in the case of the fourth Rector of St. Michael's who found herself in this role, that the foster parent could not in some situations become the adopted real parent. The foster parent image does, however, remind us that this is most definitely the exception and not the rule.

In his dissertation on the ministry of after pastors, James Stein discusses the immediate tasks which must be undertaken and lists them as goals of the interim ministry. The reality is, whether the congregation recognizes it or not, the role of any after pastor is an interim role. The goals which need to be accomplished include breaking the silence through preaching and teaching about the abuse of power which is implicit in the clergy misconduct, redefining the role of the ordained leader in the community, reinstating traditional denominational worship patterns, and developing a shared leadership model and a committee structure which will become the leadership track for the parish.¹⁶ The overarching goal of the after pastor's ministry, however, is to develop an environment or a climate where disagreement and diversity of view are the norm and where all decisions are preceded by a process which is characterized by

¹⁵Stein, 25-29.

¹⁶Ibid., 63.

discussion and questioning until a consensus emerges. Once that consensus emerges, there must then be agreement on the part of all concerned that everyone will support the decision and work for its implementation. Unfortunately, in these abused congregations, this type of leadership process is often seen “as a lack of decisiveness . . . [or even as] a sign of weak or faulty leadership . . . ”¹⁷

It is vitally important for the after pastor to cultivate space for people to disagree in community. This is often difficult to accomplish because the congregation has been acculturated so that everyone understands that the leadership track in their parish involves making certain that one pleases rather than displeases the rector since this is the way it has always worked. People know that parishioners who eventually became the insiders were the ones who pleased the abusing rector and made things happen, whereas anyone who disagreed with him or had independent ideas was swiftly excluded. Total agreement or silence on all issues was the norm.¹⁸ Breaking down repetitive behavior patterns like those is a daunting task. Peter Steinke makes a helpful suggestion, however, in his observation that a good way to get a chronically anxious system to transform itself is to get the system “to redefine the problem—to see the whole pattern of interaction. Redefining . . . intervenes into narrow viewpoints, tightened circles, and shifted burdens.”¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., 72.

¹⁸Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁹Steinke, 52.

This is the process which ultimately broke the log-jam at St. Michael's. The parish day school had been a point of conflict for its entire thirty-two year history. Following a predictable cycle, swords were drawn, the battle raged, an uneasy peace was declared, concessions were grudgingly made by one side or the other as each struggled to understand how they could get along better. After working with the consultant therapist/priest and coming to understand and accept the power of the parish's history, the Vestry was able to recognize in its communal structure, what Friedman has described as the characteristics of a stuck system: the treadmill effect in which people keep trying harder and harder to solve the problem which never gets completely solved; the polarization of an issue into a false dichotomy (such as in the church vs. the school); the need to stop seeking answers to the question of how to improve the relationship between the church and the school rather than rephrasing the basic question.²⁰ Once the Vestry was able to begin working with a redefined question it began to ask: How should the parish day school be run to support the worship ministry of the church? Then an entirely different discourse and process ensued.

One of the most challenging aspects of the task which must be undertaken if the congregation is to have a viable future lies in this area of developing healthy and mature leadership from both the clergy and laity. In these traumatized congregations, however, one almost uniformly finds that any attempt to change the way in which the congregational ministry and identity have been articulated will be met by great resistance

²⁰Friedman, "Understanding the History."

in some sectors of the congregation. Parishioners, for example, “who so closely identified with the previous pastor and derived their sense of Christian faith from that pastor’s style and persona may well never feel comfortable in the congregation again.”²¹ It is important not to minimize the difficulty involved in changing the leadership norms of these congregations. For example, vestries which have been subjected to manipulation by abusing rectors and are, therefore, comfortable with a manipulative leadership style, will find it quite difficult and even uncomfortable to function in a shared leadership format.²² As Parsons and Leas have discussed, what is ultimately required is what Edwin Friedman has referred to as “leaders . . . [who can] differentiate themselves from the anxiety of the system, while still staying connected”²³ in their leadership position. That type of leadership can promise a chronically anxious congregation which has been subjected to clergy sexual misconduct the possibility of a renewed and revitalized future.

But the wholeness emerges only when we go beyond our initial hypersensitivity and make use of our second level of response responding discriminately, consciously, and objectively. Without such clarity we have little sense of direction. We neither manage our own response nor stimulate the response of others.²⁴

This process must begin with the leadership of the clergy person who serves in the congregation as the after pastor working together with a leadership committed not only

²¹Stein, 48.

²²Ibid., 58.

²³Parsons and Leas, 9.

²⁴Steinke, 63.

to exploring new ways of being in relationship with one another but to discarding repetitive patterns of reactivity which have held the congregation hostage in its own stuck system. That type of leadership has been described as transformational in that it causes leaders and followers to raise one another “to higher levels of morality and motivation.”²⁵ For what we have learned from the way in which the principles of family systems therapy have been applied to congregational systems, is that the ability of the leadership to define themselves clearly – while remaining a non-anxious presence in the system -- is the primary factor upon which all change is predicated.²⁶

[L]eadership in families, like leadership in any flock, swarm, or herd, is essentially an organic, perhaps even biological phenomenon . . . an organism tends to function best when its “head” is well differentiated. The key to successful spiritual leadership, therefore, with success understood not only as moving people toward a goal, but also in terms of the survival of the family (and its leader), has more to do with the leader’s capacity for self-definition than with the ability to motivate others.²⁷

In the recent Summer Seminar at Seabury Western Seminary, Friedman discussed the characteristics of the leaders of Western exploration in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and drew parallels with what is required in clergy persons who find themselves in leadership positions in chronically anxious congregations. For whenever there is a

²⁵Jackson W. Carroll, “The Congregation as Chameleon: How the Present Interprets the Past,” in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 67.

²⁶Friedman, Generation, 2-3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 221.

sexual misconduct disclosure what occurs within the congregation is in fact a paradigm shift which produces with it a new view of reality. When these paradigm shifts occur the meaning of the old data or information upon which the system has been predicated changes and that ultimately leads to a change in the world view or overall perspective of the congregation. The very paradigm shift cracks the emotional gridlock, making it possible for real change in the system to take place. Friedman posited the argument that the leadership characteristics of people like Columbus, Magellan, and Da Gama, were the same characteristics which are needed by clergy leaders attempting to function in these deadlocked systems.

First and foremost, the explorers had a sense of vision, not in the sense of seeing ahead or toward a future situation but rather a visionary ability which enabled them to see their present situation differently; in other words, to visualize a different present reality. Secondly, these explorers were persistent and were not put off by resistance from people who said that it could not be done or by sabotage, which they all experienced. Thirdly, they all exhibited tremendous stamina and when hardships occurred they stood fast. Finally, they were perceived as being ruthless because they did not allow relationships to get in the way of the goal they were pursuing. This last factor Friedman noted is often the biggest stumbling block for both clergy and lay leaders as there is a real reluctance in church communities to recognize the fact that you have to allow people the right to reject your leadership. If that occurs, there is no alternative except to let those relationships fall by the wayside as the leadership continue to move forward. All

of the explorers Friedman discussed, as well as Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Jackson, and Jefferson, exemplified self-differentiated leadership as they were willing to take risks when necessary. In other words, they were not focused on safety, which is a characteristic of all chronically anxious systems.²⁸

Friedman also suggested three criteria which he claimed would be used to judge whether a leader was functioning in a moral, ethical, and mature manner. Well self-differentiated leaders do not impose themselves on others nor inject themselves into other people's relationships. They also do not interfere with a person's dependency upon someone or something as they insist that people must take responsibility for themselves. Well self-differentiated leaders do not pressure other people to conform to their views as they are comfortable allowing others to have different perspectives and to disagree with them. They also do not find it difficult to relate to people who disagree with them and are comfortable working with people who have different opinions than theirs.²⁹

Another point which Friedman made in his discussion of the role of the self-differentiated leader as the non-anxious presence, is how much the media amplifies the anxiety in institutional systems by the way in which they report upon our culture and our time in history. Friedman argued that we are living in a chronically anxious time in history and listed four characteristics of leadership that he observed to be endemic to institutions and systems. He argued that institutions seem to want to adapt or

²⁸Friedman, "Understanding the History."

²⁹Ibid.

accommodate the weak, the passive aggressive, and the immature rather than adapting in favor of strength. Secondly, he suggested that there has been a demeaning and devaluing of the self in our culture which has caused leaders to rely more upon experts and consultants, rather than being willing to lead by taking stands and defining themselves. This has led, he suggested, to a panicky obsession for data gathering and information collection. He described this obsessive collection of information by leaders as a form of substance abuse. Finally, he insisted that there has been a complete misunderstanding about the nature of evil and the toxic forces in the environment which affect our corporate lives. All pathogenic forces are alike in that they lack the ability to self-regulate, which Friedman claims is true of people as well as viruses, institutions, and countries. All toxic forces have two common characteristics: They are invasive of their neighbors space and they are unable to learn from their experience because they have no interest in learning how to self-regulate. This is why reason is never effective with these toxic forces, and also why the only way one can ultimately deal with them is by dealing with oneself. These factors, therefore, make the role of the clergy and lay leadership particularly difficult in traumatized congregations where toxic forces have often been in play for long periods of time. Leadership in these situations has to be predicated upon the way in which the leaders manage these toxic forces by understanding where they, as individuals, end and others begin, so that they can regulate their own anxiety and keep themselves from being reactive.³⁰

³⁰Ibid.

The clergy leader's role as a non-anxious presence can have an effect on the anxiety level of the congregation. The very nature of the priest's role as the leader allows her either to amplify or to dampen the level of anxiety in the congregations in which she is working. Friedman used the example of the strings on a cello by making the observation that if you pluck one string it creates movement in the next one. If you stop plucking that first string, however, the vibrations in the second one will affect the first one which initially started the movement.³¹ Thus, the anxiety in a congregation can be reduced by the leadership of a self-differentiated priest who can function as a non-anxious presence.

Reactivity is particularly intense in congregations which have been abused by clergy. That reactivity can either be expressed passively by people who want to do nothing so that nothing changes, or by people who take actions where feelings become confused with opinions, where grudges are kept, where people get hurt easily, and where people stay focused on the behavior of others rather than on their own. These situations are very difficult for the after pastor because when the reactivity becomes intense it is always focused on the after pastor. In addition, it is not only personalized but it can become very hateful. The impossibility of the after pastor's role is further heightened by what Friedman has referred to as the herding factor because it causes the congregation to value togetherness rather than self-differentiation.³² In these traumatized congregations,

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

this factor causes the most dysfunctional members of the congregation to gather together and to insist that the after pastor and the whole congregation accommodate to them. If the after pastor resists and attempts to function as a self-differentiating leader, she can be sure that her critics will use words like cruel, hard, selfish, and unfeeling to describe her behaviors. The congregation wants the after pastor to be indecisive and peace to be restored at any price. If that does not occur then it is at this juncture that what Friedman calls the power tools will be unleashed. These dependent forces in the congregation will demand that consensus, trust, empathy, and sensitivity be restored to congregational life and the after pastor's attempt to be self-differentiating will be described as abusive behavior toward others. What is happening, of course, is that the after pastor is being besieged by the forces which want her to adapt to the weakness in the congregational system by focusing on the most dependent and dysfunctional members. The entire system pushes the after pastor to focus on managerial solutions of the quick fix variety which are the very responses which do not allow the system to be transformed because they focus on the content rather than the process. If no attention is given to the emotional process which is at work in the system, then no real transformation in the system will be possible.³³

Leaders frequently quit because it is very difficult to withstand this kind of pressure which self-differentiated leadership engenders. For whenever an anxious system experiences well self-differentiated leadership there is always a tremendous

³³Ibid.

counter attack because the system always wants to force togetherness at any price. What is needed is for the leader to focus on himself or herself. Being sensitive to the needs of others really does not help people grow. What is helpful to their growth is a leader who is focused on determining what her own needs are and then focuses on those needs so that she can effectively lead the congregation. The focus of the after pastor, in particular, must remain on her response to the toxic environment in which she find herself rather than trying to be empathic to the toxic forces and the condition which they have caused in the congregational system. For the maturation of a self-differentiated leader has to do with the degree to which that leader can remain focused upon her response, because focusing her own self-differentiation as a leader is more important than focusing on trying to get other people to change.³⁴ In other words, the leader needs to remember Pattison's admonition to fulfill her being function, her limit setting function, and her risk taking function.³⁵

Whenever a leader tries to self-differentiate she can expect to experience enormous reactivity which seems to come in direct proportion to how successful the leader is in being a non-anxious presence. Thus, the very self-differentiation of the after pastor, in particular, serves to break up the togetherness of the chronically anxious congregation which is what causes the reactivity. That intense reactivity or sabotage has one principal purpose: to reestablish the togetherness which is that fused state in which

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Pattison, 64-69.

the congregation had existed until the after pastor's tenure. This intense reactivity and subsequent sabotage are issues Friedman stated, that he felt he had not made sufficiently clear in his previously published work and oral presentations. Because clergy have not really understood how powerful the sabotage could be in a chronically anxious system, after pastors who have tried to function as self-differentiated leaders have often been stunned both by the intensity of the sabotage and the varied forms in which it manifested itself in the congregational system.³⁶

That was certainly true in the case of the fourth Rector. Often the sabotage is not acknowledged because it is not recognized as such. For example, sabotage can take the form of administrative errors such as a name being dropped from a letter, people forgetting to make phone calls, staff getting sick at awkward times, intense criticism of the leadership, and people actually setting the after pastor up in order to be able to criticize her.³⁷ The fourth Rector experienced a staff person who was off from work on medical disability for five months in two years, a janitor who was off for four months due to a work related accident, a clergy assistant who got sick and could not work on Christmas Eve, and newsletters which were mailed by a staff member even though the front page had been printed where page three should have been, not to mention countless phone messages which were never received. It is interesting that neither people like Speed Leas and George Parsons, Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, or Peter Steinke who

³⁶Friedman, "Understanding the History."

³⁷Ibid.

have made use of the foundational work of Edwin Friedman, Murray Bowen, and Michael Kerr nor Friedman, Bowen or Kerr themselves have adequately described the intense nature of the sabotage which will occur in a chronically anxious congregational system when self-differentiated leadership is introduced. This may be because they have never personally experienced a chronically anxious system which has been subjected to the betrayal of the pastoral trust.

Even though the observations concerning sabotage which Friedman made were grim because he had no easy answers, they were still comforting because it made anyone trying to function as a self-differentiated leader realize that their experiences were not an aberration but rather the norm. He offered a variety of suggestions for ways one might handle sabotage. First of all he simply stated that a self-differentiated leader had to expect intense sabotage as there was no way to avoid it. Making oneself vulnerable as a self-differentiated leader would inevitably result in making the individual feel lonely and isolated. Preparing oneself for the inevitable attacks and recognizing that the purpose of the sabotage was to pull one back into the fray, hopefully, would help to keep the individual from indulging in a defensive response. Friedman also counseled attempting to respond, whenever possible, in a playful manner even though it is the last thing one feels is appropriate in these highly charged situations of intense reactivity. Finally, he urged persons trying to function as self-differentiated leaders to hold their leadership lightly, in the sense of being not too vested in the situation, since the overall objective was to keep oneself loose and focused principally upon one's own health and well

being.³⁸

As an after pastor who has been subjected to unspeakable reactivity in the form of character assassination and all of the other subtle methods previously cited, the hardest part of following Friedman's advice is that one is constantly wrestling with the question of whether this is the way in which God would want you to behave. This is the tension Steinke described which was discussed in Chapter 2.³⁹ This is also why anyone who is struggling to be an after pastor must have incredibly strong spiritual support. My spiritual director has been an invaluable resource for me personally. In the best of all possible worlds, even though it would be nice if this type of support was available from one's judicatory, I doubt that the Diocese of Los Angeles is much different than any other denomination in finding itself in a position where there simply is not enough diocesan staff available for this type of support.

Theoretically our bishops are supposed to be the pastors to the clergy. Even though our diocesan staff, including the bishops, had actually worked with Edwin Friedman, I experienced having both of my bishops triangulated by a member of my staff and several of my parishioners on two different occasions. Neither of the bishops realized, until after the fact, what had happened and how they had, in fact, made my situation much more difficult. Therefore, having a long term relationship with a spiritual director who can bring God into what seems so often to be such an unholy situation, is

³⁸Friedman, "Understanding the History."

³⁹Steinke, 59.

the most helpful resource that any after pastor can have who is struggling with the challenge of trying to be a self-differentiated leader and a non-anxious presence in a congregation which has been subjected to clergy sexual misconduct.

Women's Leadership Models

Since the fourth Rector who has served St. Michael's as the after pastor is a woman, it is appropriate to discuss the implications of having a woman as the clergy leader in a congregation which has experienced the betrayal of the pastoral trust. Women have a very difficult challenge serving as the rectors or senior pastors of congregations because, in the first place, they have to deal with all of the biases which exist in the secular world relative to the leadership of women in institutions. These issues revolve principally around the question of the type of management style women employ. Generally, women have had to manage in the same ways that men do in order to be successful. Even in the church, regardless of the denomination, one quickly learns that getting through the denominational ordination process involves learning how to do it the way the men do and then simply learning how to do it better. Once a woman is a pastor or rector of a church, she discovers the "Catch 22" quality to this dynamic because, as Carol Becker has reminded us, men feel very uncomfortable when women are successful, and the better one does the job the worse it gets for her institutionally.⁴⁰ There is no escaping the fact that even though women are expected to act like a man and

⁴⁰Carol E. Becker, "Women in Church Leadership: An Emerging Paradigm," in Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving the People, by Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 268-69.

manage like a man, if they do that too well, because gender is always the overriding issue; they will be punished for being “too assertive, direct, goal oriented, visible, or powerful.”⁴¹

Secondly, women have to reckon with the fact that, since the time of Augustine, the church has been deeply conflicted about human sexuality and has dealt with this discomfort by positing a theology which strongly suggests that women are unfit for religious leadership positions.

Women, therefore, become “standard bearers” of the sexual, living reminders that we are all sexual beings. Since the Christian tradition has long been uncomfortable with the physical, and particularly the sexual, the very presence of women is deeply troubling for the church. . . . The result is that the church has institutionalized fear of the feminine. Historically, this discomfort is illustrated by the admonition that women should cover themselves . . . , the stoning of the adulteress, the burning of “witches,” and a host of other rules and behaviors, including our current justifications for keeping women out of leadership in the church.⁴²

Although there is no question that this is a very difficult problem for clergy women to contend with, in a curious way, it can also be something which can help a female after pastor deal with the issue of her abusing predecessor’s behavior. Because women have had to grapple with this issue as they have made their way through the ordination process, they have come to understand the fixation the church has had about sexuality, intimacy, and love. Therefore, women are in a unique position to preach and teach on these issues, for as Lynn Rhodes has reminded us:

⁴¹Ibid., 256.

⁴²Ibid., 260.

If spirituality loses touch with its roots in sexuality, it loses power to form and inform our deepest selves. When sexuality is separated from spiritual development, it becomes something we use to manipulate, control, and harm what we profess to love. When spirituality is separated from our sexuality, it loses the power of personal connection and becomes lifeless—it cannot move us to passionate care for this world There is a deafening silence in churches about what it means to live passionately, with our whole selves, in a world where sex is exploited, where love is separated into boxes labeled eros or agape, where we have learned mostly what is dangerous about passion, instead of how to be life-giving with the power of love.⁴³

Women clergy have the deep understanding on this issue to be able to make inroads in this area of pastoral leadership which has done so much harm to the body of Christ in the past two millennia of Christian witness by preaching and teaching in these congregations where they are called to serve as after pastors.

Finally, women have to contend with the fact that their very presence will cause unresolved issues to surface relative to the relationships people with whom they are working have with their mothers. One can pretend that this is not the case, however, any woman who has served in any significant leadership position knows from her own experience that these issues do surface within people, that they cannot be ignored, and that they do affect the institutional working relationship which exists. Donna Schaper has described the way in which women clergy leaders are particularly affected by the phenomenon.

Whatever feelings people have about their mothers--and most people, male and female, have enormously complicated feelings

⁴³Lynn N. Rhodes, Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 64-65.

about their mothers . . . they also have about women clergy. Mothers are practically the only experience people have with female power. Put a woman in a vestment and it looks as if she has power; thus all the associations are maternal. These confusions trip up women clergy internally and externally and they need to be understood, embraced, traveled through, laughed at.⁴⁴

Although women have these burdens to contend with as they seek to lead congregations, there is also a flip side to these burdens which bears consideration in our discussion of leadership in these congregations which have been subjected to clergy sexual misconduct. These congregations have special needs in the sense that certain repetitive behavior patterns need to be uprooted as new ones are planted. Thus, the very different ways in which women lead can, in fact, be incredibly beneficial to a congregation which is trying to resurrect its communal life following a period of clergy abuse. Judy Rosener has written extensively on this whole notion of the unique style that women employ in the way in which they manage. She has been clear that this style, which she describes as interactive, is not gender specific. It is simply a style of leadership which comes more naturally to women than men largely because of the way in which women are socialized in our culture. Rosener uses the term interactive leadership to describe this leadership style which has become the hallmark of the second generation of managerial women. An interactive management style has four primary characteristics. Interactive leaders tend to encourage the participation of subordinates, share power and information with persons they manage and interact with as peers, work to enhance the

⁴⁴Donna Schaper, Common Sense about Men and Women in the Ministry (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1990), 13.

self-worth of others both in the way in which work is assigned and evaluated, and consciously energize others by displaying enthusiasm for the work they are doing. Interactive leaders naturally understand that people work better and more enthusiastically when they feel good about themselves and when they feel that they have a real stake in the way in which decision are made.⁴⁵

It is also interesting to note that in the study which Rosener did, she found that many of the women whom she interviewed indicated that they had gotten their first significant leadership opportunity in the business world because the organization or institution they were asked to lead was in serious turmoil.⁴⁶ This is also very true for women in the church. For across denominational lines the churches in which women most often get the opportunity to serve as senior pastors or rectors are churches which have had significant problems in their past and are challenges that the men, frankly, shun in an effort to find pastoral opportunities which will do more for their career paths than these troubled cures.

More and more attention is being given to the ways in which successful women manage the institutions they lead. Women clergy, particularly those who find themselves in difficult congregations, would do well to familiarize themselves with this emerging corpus of literature as the methodology and approach can be adapted to their work in the church. For example, in a recent issue of Fortune magazine, the lead article looked at

⁴⁵Judy B. Rosener, "Ways Women Lead," Harvard Business Review, Nov.-Dec. 1990, 120-24.

⁴⁶Ibid., 125.

the careers of seven women and analyzed the ways in which they exercised leadership. The article discussed five ways in which these women had achieved the power they had and how these five factors helped them maintain it as they successfully led their business enterprises. The women all used their sexuality in the sense of not worrying about being seen to be feminine. Instead of trying to be masculine in their approach, by doing it the way a man would, they were unapologetic about the feminine perspective they employed or even the way in which they dressed. Secondly, these women did not plan their careers, but merely took advantage of the opportunities which came their way and used their natural adaptability as women to adjust to whatever situation in which they found themselves. Thirdly, they recognized the fact that if they were going to aspire to a leadership position, they would not have an easy time. Thus, they were able to accept the sabotage, discrimination, and opposition they received from both women and men. Fourth, they made no attempt to blend into the expectations of the corporate culture, but rather trusted their natural intuition to be themselves. As a result they went about their tasks in ways that seemed right to them but which often meant ignoring the accepted manner in which things had always been done in the institution in which they were working. Finally, and perhaps most controversially from a feminine perspective, they did not favor women, but all managed in a gender free manner always intent in securing the best person for the position. The article concluded by noting that each of the women profiled in the article had affirmed that life at the top never ceased to be both difficult

and, at times, frankly uncomfortable.⁴⁷

The next chapter will explore methodologies for developing program and management structures which suggest ways for moving abused congregations, functioning as chronically anxious systems, into new patterns of interpersonal relationship and emotional process and, therefore, toward the promise of renewed life and vitality. Central to this task, however, is the recognition that the management style of women may, in fact, be a style which is far more suited to the work which needs to be done in these congregations rather than other older, more traditional management styles. Thus, in these troubled congregations, the way in which women have always done it, unorthodox though it may be, may in fact, be the path to health.

Donna Schaper has suggested that, for her, the idea of agency means functioning as one who “does something on his/her own terms.”⁴⁸ She goes on to discuss her conviction that women are unique religious agents. Because of that, women must trust their instincts and proudly function as religious agents not only by describing their personal life experience but by making their decision on that experiential base as well. Then, on that base, women must work to create the kind of communities which will hold them accountable, not only by criticizing their decisions but by supporting them as well.⁴⁹ Women can accomplish this by remembering that

⁴⁷Patricia Sellers, “Women, Sex and Power,” *Fortune*, 5 Aug. 1996, 42-56; and Jean Gorman, “A Stake in Success,” *Interiors*, Dec. 1995, 28-33.

⁴⁸Schaper, 79.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 79-80.

making a congregation conscious of mutually set goals, and forgiving them as often as you forgive yourself for not quite heading there full steam ahead, is professional ministry. That is what we are there to do. We acquaint people with the road. We join them in finding God along the road.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Ibid., 81.

CHAPTER 5

Dances of Resurrection: A Curriculum for Resurrection and New Life

We are now ready to turn to a discussion of the problem which was set forth in Chapter 1: What is the process which is required to rebuild and renew the life and the faith of a congregation which has been devastated by the betrayal of the pastoral trust? The thesis which has been posited in this work suggests that the resurrection of congregations which have been devastated by the betrayal of the pastoral trust through clergy sexual misconduct is dependent upon the congregation's developing a clear understanding of healthy leadership models; appropriate boundaries and expectations; open methods of decision making, conflict resolution and communication so that it can articulate a renewed sense of mission, revitalize its ministries, restore its financial base, incorporate new members and move into the future with confidence. The task which is required is clear; the question before us is how is this to be accomplished.

In 1949 Ralph Tyler published Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction which proposed a planning paradigm which has had incredibly wide application in all areas of our contemporary life. It has been central to the way in which religious educators have approached the problem of curriculum and program development in congregations. Tyler suggested that the first task of curriculum development was to identify the goal which was to be accomplished. Secondly, specific experiences were to be articulated which would accomplish that goal. Once those experiences, which came to be known as objectives, were identified; a plan or program could be developed which

would effectuate them. The final step in Tyler's paradigm was an evaluation process which assessed whether the goal had been accomplished. He was forthright in his declaration that "education is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people."¹ Clearly what is necessary, in any congregation which has suffered clergy abuse, particularly over a long period of time such as St. Michael's, is a curriculum which can accomplish significant behavioral change in individuals as well as in the congregation as a system itself.

If we consider the thesis of this work to be the goal we wish to accomplish, our next step would be to identify the specific experiences or objectives which are necessary to attain that goal. As we embark on the identification of these experiences, it is well to remember that Tyler counseled being judicious when deciding the extent of the educational program to be undertaken noting that "it is essential . . . to select the number of objectives that can actually be attained in significant degree in the time available, and that these be really important ones. . . ."² Furthermore, he suggested that the objectives should describe the specific changes which were desired and, therefore, should not be stated in generalized behavior patterns but rather should delineate the specific actions it is hoped the learner will develop as well as the "content area of life" which would be involved.³ In the case of congregations which have been traumatized by sexual

¹Ralph W. Tyler, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 5-6.

²Ibid., 33.

³Ibid, 44-46.

misconduct, a number of objectives have been identified in Chapters 2 through 4 as things which need to occur if the congregation is to experience new life. These experiences, which will serve as our objectives, are as follows:

1. Breaking the silence about abuse and inappropriate behavior in relationships.
2. Learning to accept responsibility for oneself.
3. Redefining the clerical role and the nature of the relationship between priest and parishioner.
4. Restoring the congregation's understanding of itself as the Body of Christ and the centrality of Christ in all its relationships.
5. Reinstating traditional worship patterns.
6. Reconnecting the parish with the diocese and the larger church.
7. Developing a shared leadership model.
8. Building a strong sense of community.
9. Replacing the metaphor of "family" with "community."
10. Discerning the mission: What is God calling God's people to do?
11. Learning to tolerate diversity, and conflict while moving toward consensus.

In his discussion of the development of appropriate objectives, Tyler states that the needs of the learner must be measured against a desirable standard. Because of the inevitable gap which exists between the present -- what is -- and the future -- what should be, it is necessary to be mindful of what Tyler has described as tensions which must be reconciled.⁴ These aforementioned objectives represent the tensions that exist in

⁴Ibid., 5-8.

congregations which have been traumatized by clergy sexual misconduct which must be accommodated in any curriculum that seeks to engender behavioral change. These tensions are examples of the cognitive dissonance which exists in the congregation between what is and what should be. Tyler, however, also counseled patience when attempting to make significant behavioral changes and remarked that “learning takes place through the active behavior of the student; it is what he does that he learns . . . [therefore the] essential means of education are the experiences provided, not the things to which the student is exposed.”⁵

How then are we to embark on this task of implementing these objectives in these congregations which have been severely traumatized? For not only are we faced with persons in the congregation who have known and loved the abusing former clergy person, but also the persons who have acknowledged that they were abused, and still others who are in denial unable to admit the abuse even to themselves. As if this were not enough, we also have the problem of providing for the newcomers to the congregation who are bringing new life but who also want to make connections with the existing parishioners so they can feel that they have become a part of the congregation. It is vitally important to insure that these newcomers do not learn the systemic patterns of dysfunction and abuse which are part of the congregation’s past but rather that they be channeled into healthy patterns of congregational life. Thus, from an educational perspective the needs of the learners in these traumatized congregations are incredibly

⁵Ibid., 63-64.

varied. Donald Miller provides us with a helpful perspective as we seek to develop a curriculum which will lead to the implementation of the objectives we have identified. In his discussion of the ways in which both vision and energy can be developed in a congregation, Miller suggests that the context in which the congregation finds itself serves as a significant factor which must be taken into consideration. He describes this context as being inclusive of “persons, meeting place, surrounding community, economic circumstances, social attitudes, and historical events.”⁶

Mary Elizabeth Moore has also written about this same phenomenon and has pointed out that all learning takes place in the context of relationships at what she has called an “intersection,” which may be any venue of congregational life. She has described an intersection as that place

where person meets person, where person faces future, where person probes past, where person confronts contemporary issues. Persons stand in relationship to God and in relation to the world of past, present and future The starting point is the intersection, and at this intersection are not only the Bible and the present life experience of individuals but parents, church folk, the historical church tradition, the fears and hopes for the future of the world, the culture in which the church exists, the issues of the global village, and God.⁷

Her description of the intersection is a graphic picture of all of the factors which must be

⁶Donald Eugene Miller, “Centers of Vision and Energy,” in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 116.

⁷Mary Elizabeth Moore, Education for Continuity and Change (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 110-11.

taken into account when planning for ways in which these severely traumatized congregations can be educated into new and healthy patterns of relationship in their community life. Therefore, regardless of the curriculum we decide to employ to achieve the healing of these congregations; we must always be mindful of the fact that we stand in a very peculiar intersection. For in this intersection abuse has occurred, the pastoral trust has been betrayed, truth has been veiled in secrecy, and a cult of personality has displaced the Lordship of Christ. Therefore, we must never loose sight of the reality that “to teach in relation to persons at the intersection is to be aware of the issues, feelings, needs, dreams, and capabilities of those persons.”⁸

Finally, Moore has also warned us of the inevitable emotional blocks, even in the best of circumstances, that all people bring to these intersections. Obviously, this is a significant issue which we must consider in working with these congregations which have been traumatized through the public disclosure of the sexual misconduct and are reeling from shock, disbelief and denial.⁹ Additionally, in the case of St. Michael’s, there was also the factor of the Northridge earthquake which occurred exactly one month after the public disclosure of the third Rector’s admission of sexual misconduct. The emotional trauma caused by the earthquake affected every member of the congregation and ranged from people’s homes being completely destroyed to displacement for almost every individual in the congregation while repairs were being made to their respective

⁸Ibid., 162.

⁹Ibid.

homes. Therefore, since the intersection in which St. Michael's presently finds itself still has all of the rubble of the earthquake, which people continue to dig through in order to lay that experience behind them, the educational objectives which are articulated for St. Michael's must be especially sensitive to the context of that reality as well.

As we approach the task of curriculum development for these congregations, Maria Harris' concept of the three curricula which always co-exist is a theory which is particularly relevant for our work. Harris describes these three curricula as the explicit curriculum which includes "the particular topics, ideas, courses, themes and units of study to be explored";¹⁰ and the implicit curriculum as inclusive of "such elements as the patterns of organization or authority; the attitudes of persons toward one another; the way power is shared; the freedom to speak (who does speak, and perhaps more subtly, who gets heard); and the kinds of physical setting in which teaching happens."¹¹ Finally, the null curriculum is everything that is not covered either by the explicit or implicit curricula and yet affects our learning because "not being educated in something skews our perceptions, limits our alternatives, [and] narrows our options."¹² Harris' concept of these three interlocking curricula is particularly complementary to the systems analysis we have employed in this case study. This approach to educational planning, as well as

¹⁰Maria Harris, "Teaching: Forming and Transforming Grace," in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 243.

¹¹Ibid., 244.

¹²Ibid., 245.

Moore's admonitions regarding the necessity of our being mindful of the intersections in which we are working, provide us with helpful models as we begin our conceptualization of the type of curriculum we envision for these churches we seek to resurrect.

In her book, Fashion Me A People, Harris acknowledges the importance of the paradigm set forth for curriculum planning in Ralph Tyler's seminal work and the influence it has had for more than forty years.¹³ She also acknowledges the work of people such as C. Ellis Nelson, John Westerhoff, Mary Boys, and Paulo Freire who have challenged Tyler's paradigm as they have sought to create new approaches in their work.¹⁴ Harris, however, sees the work of curriculum development differently. For her it is a dynamic process because she believes that we are all co-creators with God in a continually evolving creation. In other words, we are working "in partnership with God to fashion even as we are being fashioned"¹⁵ She argues that the manner in which people live together in congregational communities is inevitably mediated by what she calls the "set of forms 'traditioned' to us through the centuries by the Christian church, the set of forms that taken together, comprise the curriculum of the church."¹⁶

¹³Harris, Fashion, 168-69.

¹⁴Ibid., 170. See also Mary Boys, "Curriculum Thinking from a Roman Catholic Perspective," Religious Education 75, no. 5 (Sept.-Oct. 1980): 516-28; C. Ellis Nelson, Where Faith Begins (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1967); Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970); and John H. Westerhoff, III, Living the Faith Community (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985).

¹⁵ Harris, Fashion, 16.

¹⁶Ibid.

Therefore, what Harris describes as the “fashioning and refashioning” of these various forms, is what she views as the central educational enterprise of the church. It is that process, and the manner in which it impacts individuals, which actually serves to fashion both the individual parishioner and the institution of the church.¹⁷ Furthermore, it is through this constant process of fashioning and refashioning, Harris suggests, that we find our vocation as Christians, ordained and unordained alike. Because for Harris, being a Christian “involves living fully in the present, assisted by the visions and memory of the past . . . [along with] the vision and hopes of the future . . . [as we work] through systems and forms that are worthy of us as a people called in baptism,”¹⁸ to a new life in Christ, who is our model. What Harris is suggesting by her departure from the work of Tyler and even more recent colleagues, such as Boys, Freire, Nelson, and Westerhoff, is to chart a new path for curriculum development shaped by her conviction that all curriculum must be inclusive of “the entire course of the church’s life, the play and interplay of community, prayer, service, teaching, and proclamation.”¹⁹ In other words, what she is really saying is that the parish community, and all that it encompasses, is in fact the curriculum.²⁰

The steps in Harris’ process of planning a curriculum are based upon her

¹⁷Ibid., 17.

¹⁸Ibid., 27.

¹⁹Ibid., 170-71.

²⁰Ibid., 174.

understanding of the community as an artist, and all of its constituents as partners with God in the continuing work of creation. Thus, she images the steps in her process of curriculum development in terms of the steps in a dance rather than the more traditional image of steps as a part of a ladder or staircase.²¹ She names those steps as: contemplation, which deals with the needs and realities of the parishioners, the present ministries and purpose;²² engagement, which is that inevitable process of holding and letting go which must occur;²³ formgiving, which is the act of shaping and reshaping in order to support and implement the new vision;²⁴ emergence, that process through which the church declares “its mission, ministry, and identity in the present;”²⁵ and finally, release which is the act of trusting that the Spirit is moving in the community particularly when things do not go exactly as anticipated.²⁶

Harris challenges us to think in different ways. She asks us to forego our linear approach to educational planning by exploring new ways of conceiving experiences which can become the vehicles for learning in our congregations. Nowhere is this fresh insight more vitally needed than in these severely traumatized congregations where

²¹Ibid., 172; see also Maria Harris, Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco), 1987, 23-40.

²²Ibid., 173; see also Harris, Teaching and Religious, 23-40.

²³Ibid., 175; see also Harris, Teaching and Religious, 23-40.

²⁴Ibid., 177; see also Harris, Teaching and Religious, 23-40.

²⁵Ibid., 180; see also Harris, Teaching and Religious, 23-40.

²⁶Ibid., 181; see also Harris, Teaching and Religious, 23-40.

sexual misconduct has occurred along with the betrayal of the pastoral trust. It is always a challenge to adapt to new ways of thinking and yet, as Craig Dykstra has observed, “curriculum is not in any of its most important senses, reducible to resource materials, no matter how good and how useful . . . curriculum is an activity, a practice of a people.”²⁷

Not only does Harris dare us to think imaginatively about educational planning but she also asks us to reflect upon the power dynamic implicit in the act of teaching,²⁸ which is a significant issue in congregations which have experienced clergy sexual abuse. For in these congregations the vehicle for the betrayal of the pastoral trust has been the abuse of the power which the ordained leader enjoys as the priest and primary teacher in the congregation. Maria Harris’s exploration of this issue provides us with a clear rationale for the approach the after pastor, as teacher, must employ if the objectives we have identified are going to be achieved. Harris eloquently describes this pedagogical approach as follows:

Imagined religiously. . . the power of which I speak, since it is a shared power, is directed toward creating a communion of intersubjectivity, a power of community where one’s capacity and ability to act is with and for others as well as with and for oneself. . . a teacher working with such a vision of power is a kind of priest, ordaining the learner into a world of responsibility. . . . This is the grace of power: recognizing the holiness in ourselves released and sent forth, into the universe.²⁹

²⁷Craig Dykstra, foreward to Fashion Me A People, by Maria Harris (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1989), 8.

²⁸Harris, Teaching and Religious, 78-82.

²⁹Ibid., 82.

More than forty years ago Tyler cautioned us to remember that “important changes in human behavior are not produced overnight . . . changes in ways of thinking, in fundamental habits, in major operating concepts, in attitudes, in abiding interests. . . develop slowly.”³⁰ This is especially good advice for those of us who work with these congregations which have been abused where the principal educational task which is required is to change attitudes and the habitual ways in which persons have existed in relationships, rather than teaching a set of theorems or doctrines which the people are expected to learn. Because the curriculum we are proposing for the healing of these abused congregations seeks to effect changes in the homeostasis of the congregation, clarity concerning the specific objectives which are required to move the congregation toward new life are necessary. Tyler’s old fashioned planning paradigm serves an important role in keeping the focus on the specific changes which need to be effectuated if attitudes and old relationship models are to change. On the other hand, the innovative work of Maria Harris is also relevant because the task which lies before us is a task in which God must be perceived as a central player since the relationship between the Creator and the faithful in these parish communities has been seriously jeopardized. As we get ready to begin planning the specific experiences which we hope will attain the objectives that we have set forth, it is well to remember Harris’ admonishment that “we who hope to fashion a renewed curriculum, and in so doing fashion a new people, . . . must trust, as our God has done with us, that the dynamics of grace are there in the

³⁰Tyler, 83.

curriculum and in all the people, acting for and with each other.”³¹ Thus, the perspectives of Ralph Tyler and Maria Harris toward curriculum development, which seem to be diametrically opposed, are in fact extraordinarily complementary when employed in planning curricula for congregations in intersections where the betrayal of the pastoral trust has occurred.

There are four different dances which congregations who are seeking to resurrect their corporate lives must learn as they go about forging a healthy future after the betrayal of the pastoral trust through clergy sexual misconduct. Each of these four dances has its own set of specific steps. As with many artistic or creative enterprises, however, the learners will discover that they will often employ the steps of a dance they have already mastered while they are in the process of learning a new dance with unique steps of its own. Thus, one set of experiences will not only build on the others, but will also support and enrich those experiences which have already been learned. This is the same phenomenon that Maria Harris has described as the way in which what she calls “the forms of ministry are interrelated.”³² The dances which these traumatized congregations must learn if they are to experience new life are in fact collections of experience which we would name as: The Dance of Community, The Dance of Discerning God’s Call, The Dance of Story, and The Dance of Worship.

³¹Harris, Fashion, 181.

³²Ibid., 44.

The Dance of Community

Since we are using Harris' concept of the congregation as both the subject and the object of the educational enterprise,³³ we shall begin our discussion of these four dances by first looking at The Dance of Community. In the first place, for a long time we have, both generically and inaccurately, described this dance by using the metaphor of family. Because we have used the metaphor of family to describe congregational life, people have extrapolated from that metaphor the possibility of finding a level of emotional intimacy within the congregation which is neither appropriate nor possible.³⁴ The problems with the family metaphor for congregational life are acutely evident in congregations which have experienced clergy sexual misconduct. As a result, Marie Fortune argues for the use of the metaphor "community" as a much healthier image.³⁵ If one thinks of the congregation as a family; it is inevitable that the ordained leader is regarded as the parent. As a result, the parishioner often follows the directions of that clergy person simply because the priest is viewed as a parental authority figure. The process of assessing whether the advice, request, or demand is appropriate is completely omitted because since the priest has spoken; assent seems the only possible course of action.

At St. Michael's, the identification of the congregation as a family was a part of its

³³Ibid., 50.

³⁴Fortune, 105; and Harris, Fashion, 82.

³⁵Fortune, 106.

ethos from its earliest years. For example, during the first Rector's tenure, his role as the father figure was so powerful that he could expect everyone in the parish to attend a funeral if the bereaved family had no close family. "We will be their family," he would declare and everyone who possibly could would rearrange their schedules and be present.³⁶ No one stopped to question, much less challenge, the first Rector's word; it was tacitly understood that membership in the family was predicated upon one's acceptance of the authority of the Rector in the same way one acceded to parental authority in one's family of origin. To disagree with the Rector meant that one had to leave the family. Thus, during the crisis over the establishment of the parish day school during the tenure of the second Rector, nine of the twelve members of the Vestry and one third of the congregation left the parish. The power of this dynamic was dramatically displayed during the public disclosure meeting of the third Rector's sexual misconduct when a parishioner described a session with him in his office which involved nudity on her part. Because the session had been consensual and suggested by the third Rector for her ultimate benefit, she still did not regard it as having been inappropriate behavior on his part nor a violation of boundaries.³⁷

In describing the reasons why people are drawn together to form communities, Maria Harris lists the following motivations: "the impetus toward belonging; toward associating with those sharing a common heritage, belief and way of life; and toward the

³⁶Comment by a parishioner during an Adult Education Class, 27 Oct. 1996.

³⁷Comments by a parishioner at the Public Disclosure Meeting, 14 Dec., 1993.

human need to share.”³⁸ Building upon those motivations, Mansell Pattison has given us a description of the functions which should be provided by a parish community if it is to operate as a strong and healthy church system. He suggests that it should have leadership, developed within the system, which provides ideas, the means of action, and adequate coordination. The parish should be able to define its common identity through the articulation of its values, goals and, faith so that a shared sense of identity can serve as a foundation for the system. In addition, the parish should have: specific behavioral sanctions and expectations; an organization that provides access for new members; clearly defined goals and tasks which provide opportunities for people to work together thereby, developing a group identity; opportunities for play and casual encounters which serve to deepen relationships among parishioners; opportunities for intimacy within prescribed parameters of clearly defined behavioral taboos particularly in the areas of sex and aggression; and, finally, reestablished connections with the surrounding community as well as the larger church.³⁹ This redefinition of the congregation’s corporate life is absolutely vital if the congregation is to grow out of the unhealthy patterns of its past. As Hopewell has noted, a congregation is ultimately defined by its world view which is formed by the way in which parishioners deal with one another, how they organize themselves in community, as well as how they interact with the world beyond the

³⁸Harris, Fashion, 76.

³⁹Pattison, 22-27.

parish.⁴⁰

Since the curriculum we are developing seeks to resurrect a congregation which has been subjected to clergy sexual misconduct, it is important to look at the changes which the educational task needs to address in terms of redefining the priest's role in the congregation. First of all, it is important to reiterate what has already been described in Chapter 4 in terms of the need to move away from the model of patriarchal clergy leadership, which for nearly two thousand years of Christian witness has been the norm. Unquestionably, as Marie Fortune has pointed out, clergy "need to understand the nature of the power and authority of their role and the responsibility that goes with it. They need to learn how to maintain boundaries in relationships with parishioners, . . . [how] to care for their own emotional and sexual needs in appropriate ways, . . . [and] be encouraged to seek consultation with professional peers in order to avoid isolation in their pastoral roles."⁴¹ This changing context in which the clergy are called to function requires the ordained person to recognize that even though they are in a relationship of collegiality and mutuality with the parish; it is still incumbent upon them to develop a completely separate system to meet their own personal, psychosocial and intimate needs.⁴²

This separation is imperative due to the fact that not only have there been

⁴⁰Hopewell, 57.

⁴¹Fortune, 106.

⁴²Pattison, 84.

profound changes in the cultural mores, but also in the role of the ordained person in the contemporary congregation. In the first place, the pedestal has been removed; today clergy are regarded as ordinary human beings. Secondly, the Church, as an institution, has infinitely less power in our culture; thus, the pronouncements of clergy are far less influential than they used to be. For example, many ethical issues are resolved via the sciences, medicine, or politics rather than by a pronouncement from the Church. Yet the irony is, that even though the clergy leader has been removed from the pedestal, and in most congregations transformed into a program director/administrator, clergy are still expected to be morally superior to the average lay person. It is no wonder then that many clergy persons feel threatened by denominational powers, or powerful figures in their congregations.⁴³

Redefining the role of the ordained leader in the congregation is the principal task of every after pastor. Even though this redefinition is an extremely difficult task, it is also a vitally important one. For if the after pastor does this reasonably well, the congregation has an extremely good prognosis for a healthy future. When people have been used to relating to the rector as an a parental authority figure, they are also accustomed to a relationship characterized by a continuing state of anxiety. That anxiety is produced by the tensions caused by the alternating emotions of respect, rebellion, and resentment which are endemic to any parent child relationship. Furthermore, when an individual's needs are not met in the specific way in which they have envisioned, anger is

⁴³Rediger, 113-15.

inevitably directed at the clergy person.⁴⁴ Thus, the most important objective for the priest is to define herself in relation to the others within the congregational system by establishing appropriate boundaries and articulating her own needs.

In the same way that a successful dance instructor must eventually stop demonstrating the correct steps and must encourage her students to feel the rhythm of the music for themselves; it is vitally important that the after pastor remain independent from the congregational system while, at the same time remaining connected to it as the ordained leader with all that the role implies. In order for the clergy person to self-differentiate successfully in this way, she must have a clear sense of who she is, what her needs are, and where she is going. Although the priest is part of the congregation, in the sense of being connected to it through their role as the clergy leader, she must also remain separate from it, especially in terms of having all of her personal needs met. This is a difficult task and one that takes constant vigilance on the part of the priest for it involves defining one's own boundaries as well as having specific personal goals. "Learning to take actions based on one's own "convictions instead of on the basis of emotional reactivity,"⁴⁵ is a learned behavior which is antithetical to the old model of clergy leadership in which most clergy are still being trained.

What we are describing is Murray Bowen's concept of self-differentiation; that process of defining one's self in relation to others in the system. In addition to remaining

⁴⁴ Pattison, 74-75.

⁴⁵Steinke, 90.

connected to others in the congregational system, it is also necessary to manage whatever anxiety arises because one is not behaving according to people's expectations. When the anxiety reaches a boiling point, the clergy leader, must fight the temptation either to distance herself emotionally by disconnecting from the congregational system altogether or to fuse with the system by acquiescing to its demands. Neither of these behaviors is desirable; what is required is for the clergy leader to continue to define herself while staying connected to the system.⁴⁶

If the clergy person is to function successfully as a self-differentiated leader, the lay leadership must insure that the parish's support for the priest includes attention to the clergy person's physical and spiritual health. This support should include a compensation package which includes an adequate salary, benefits, as well as sabbaticals and annual continuing education leaves; psychological counseling; and peer support. Furthermore, it is important that the lay leadership support the priest in her establishment of appropriate boundaries and relationships in relation to her work with parishioners. It is also imperative, therefore, when clergy evaluations are done, that these needs of the clergy person are also evaluated in terms of whether the parish is providing them along with the assessment of whether the clergy person is providing the leadership expected of the Rector of the parish. It is even better if the letter of agreement or covenant of ministry, drawn up between the congregation and the clergy person, specifies what the priest expects the lay leadership to do for her as well as what the lay leadership expects

⁴⁶Ibid., 28-31.

the priest to do for the parish. Even when these things are stated in letters of agreement, however, it is difficult to get congregations to honor them because monies are almost always tight in these traumatized congregations. Thus, there is rarely enough money to provide the financial support which may be delineated in the letter of agreement.

Two other factors which profoundly affect the quality of community life are the need to reconnect the congregation with the denomination as well as the larger church and the surrounding community. After pastors find that these congregations which have been abused through clergy sexual misconduct almost always have become disconnected both from their denomination as well as the larger church because as “the pastor becomes so closely identified with the local congregation . . . the members begin to think of it as the pastor’s church rather than a congregation with its own identity.”⁴⁷ At St. Michael’s when the fourth Rector led the parish through the normal set of Holy Week services during the first year of her tenure, some members of the parish thought she had personally devised these liturgies. They had no idea that they were in the Book of Common Prayer as the liturgical norm observed in all Episcopal churches since the congregation had never experienced any of these traditional Holy Week Services during the third Rector’s long tenure.

It is also almost always necessary to rebuild the financial base of these congregations “because the previous pastor may have solicited funds for congregational

⁴⁷Stein, 33-34.

activities on a more personal basis”⁴⁸ This was certainly the case at St. Michael’s as most pastoral care was on a pay-as-you-go basis because one could only see the Rector as a counselee and, as such, paid a fee for those services. One paid the fee for the counseling session by writing a check to the Rector’s Discretionary Fund.⁴⁹ During the entire twenty-five years of the third Rector’s tenure, he never involved himself in any formal stewardship program by encouraging parishioners to make a financial pledge to the annual operating budget of the parish. Although he expected the lay leadership to handle all aspects of stewardship, he did not allow them to have any involvement in the articulation of the parish’s vision of ministry. He wrote both the educational philosophy for the parish day school as well as the parish mission statement which was printed in the “Parish Profile” used during the search process for the fourth Rector.⁵⁰ Thus, the leadership had no experience in discerning their sense of what God was calling them to do as God’s people in this place at this time. If they had that experience of discernment, they would have had an opportunity to learn the steps of our second dance.

The Dance of Discerning God’s Call

The second dance in the curriculum we are proposing for these traumatized congregations we have named The Dance of Discerning God’s Call. This dance is dependent upon the clergy leader functioning as the creative visionary for “the vision is

⁴⁸Ibid., 64.

⁴⁹Conversations with a staff person and a parishioner during the winter of 1994.

⁵⁰Weaver L. Stevens, “In Search of a Jungian Viewpoint for Elementary Education,” Studio City, Calif., 1974; and “Parish Profile,” 1.

the group's way of defining itself and chartering its purpose."⁵¹ The clergy leader is the one who can serve as the catalyst or spark to spur the group to embrace the vision. In order to do that, however the leader has to function "with integrity. . . [and must promote] responsibility in others, . . . [which can only be accomplished] by defining self, regulating one's own anxiety, staying connected to others, stimulating their resources and staying the course."⁵² People need vision and must be pushed beyond their comfort zone because "without clarity people perish in their emotional intensity. They are not challenged sufficiently to raise their threshold for pain and thereby to respond to life instead of to react against it."⁵³

If the clergy leader is able to be self-differentiating she will serve as a powerful model and will have the ability to motivate the mature persons in the congregations. The challenge for the congregation, and the lay leadership in particular, is not to allow themselves to become immobilized by the immature people in the congregation who will be threatened by self-differentiated leadership and will work to sabotage that leadership either by distancing themselves or attempting to fuse more tightly with the system.⁵⁴ At St. Michael's a small number of people were able to keep the Vestry immobilized for several months by their ongoing critique of what they described as the fourth Rector's

⁵¹Steinke, 103.

⁵²Ibid., 104.

⁵³Ibid., 66.

⁵⁴Ibid., 83.

management style.⁵⁵

Clergy persons can promote health influencing responses in their congregations by continuing to focus on themselves and not others, by accommodating to strength in the congregation rather than weakness, by staying focused on the process rather than the content, by valuing integrity rather than unity, by paying attention to the system rather than the symptom, and to the direction rather than the condition.⁵⁶ In this way the clergy person will be able to manage her own anxiety as she leads the congregation into healthy new relationships. Clergy must understand and help their parishioners to understand the fact that ministry in the contemporary parish is a shared enterprise.⁵⁷ Their role is to help people develop the resources they need to do ministry in the world. Although the priest is an integral part of the system, she needs to regard her relationship to the congregation as a covenantal one. Therefore, it is particularly important that a clergy person coming to a new cure, particularly one where their predecessor has engaged in sexual misconduct, see herself as an agent whose task is to help the congregation discover its own sense of mission. Thus, it is imperative that she does not have an agenda of her own when she accepts the call; but, instead, understands that her role is to lead the congregation in discerning what the people think God is calling them to

⁵⁵Minutes of the Vestry meetings of July 8 and 15; Aug. 3, 5 and 24; and 28 Sept. 1996.

⁵⁶Steinke, 108-09.

⁵⁷Rediger, 19.

do at this particular time as God's people in this place.⁵⁸

Maria Harris has noted that the separate roles of the ordained and the non-ordained "are complementary to one another and often overlapping."⁵⁹ The objective is to share power in healthy relationships of collegiality and mutuality⁶⁰ and to lead by modeling, not as the star on the center stage completely in control of everything and every one, but merely as one part of the whole.⁶¹ For as Donna Schaper has noted, "power is. . . the release of one's gifts with the expressed purpose of releasing the gifts of others."⁶² That is what constitutes effective parish leadership. For the process of building and shaping community is dependent upon that dynamic; if one is faithful to that model, then one will find that the congregation will "grow both numerically and spiritually, if power is constantly being redistributed, if people are changing seats and inviting each other to express differences."⁶³

It is difficult for some people and virtually impossible for others to adapt to a shared leadership model. At St. Michael's during Vestry meetings people often wanted the fourth Rector to tell them what should be their course of action and became angry

⁵⁸R. Paul Stevens and Phil Collins, The Equipping Pastor: A Systems Approach to Congregational Leadership (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1993), 2-6.

⁵⁹Harris, Fashion, 33.

⁶⁰Ibid, 33-35.

⁶¹Pattison, 83-84.

⁶²Schaper, 77.

⁶³Ibid., 64.

when she refused. One night during a heated meeting over the renewal of the Headmaster's contract, the School Board Treasurer shouted, "What we need is a leader who will make a decision!" as he looked directly at the fourth Rector. Instead of making that decision, however, she continued to insist that they struggle with the issue until they could come to a common point of consensus.⁶⁴ In her monograph regarding assessing the readiness of congregations to move out of the unhealthy relationship patterns which have developed because of clergy abuse, Nancy Hopkins has been clear in her insistence that the priest should work with the leadership who are interested and not worry about those persons who do not wish to move forward in a shared leadership format.⁶⁵

Lyle Schaller reminds us that almost any church can respond to a radically changed environment by defining a new audience and articulating a different sense of mission.⁶⁶ The articulation of a new mission, however, will inevitably cause additional anxiety in what is already in most cases a chronically anxious system. It is important to remember, however, that anxiety in and of itself, can be a positive force because it can serve as an agent of transformation.⁶⁷ Furthermore, if the congregation is successfully

⁶⁴Vestry Meeting, 28 Nov. 1994. At junctures like this the third Rector was always willing to assume the role of the parental authority figure and tell the Vestry what to do. Therefore, the lay leadership never felt ownership for decisions which were made and felt free to undermine them if they disagreed or their implementation became difficult.

⁶⁵Nancy Hopkins, "Assessing Readiness," 44.

⁶⁶Lyle Schaller, Innovations in Ministry: Models for the Twenty-first Century (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 52.

⁶⁷Steinke, 22.

attracting newcomers, their presence will serve to amplify the anxiety in what is already a long time chronically anxious system. Managing the anxiety in the system while leading as a non-anxious presence, is yet another challenging task the after pastor is required to undertake. Thus, among the other assorted perceived short-comings of the after pastor, particularly in the eyes of the more immature members of the congregation, will be the lack of attention the priest is giving to the “old time members” of the congregation since she is focusing all of her attention on the newcomers.

Thus, it is axiomatic that as newcomers are integrated into the congregational body and a new sense of mission is articulated; some persons who are unable to accommodate to the changed environment, will become agents of virulent reactivity; while others will become the architects of intentional sabotage; and still others will simply withdraw because they cannot stand the emotional intensity. At St. Michael's three members of the Vestry resigned because they disapproved of the fourth Rector's management style while a fourth person, who supported the Rector, simply could not stand the heightened anxiety which had been produced by the crisis over the fourth Rector's leadership. What is difficult to remember at junctures like this, is

how nothing else redistributes power so effectively
as conflict and how redistributing power in
organizations is healthy. The more frequently
it is done, the more open the organization.
The more open the organization, the more possible
it is for people to find God there.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Schaper, 44.

It is also precisely at such moments of crisis that an after pastor must remember that it is always necessary to resist following what Schaper has called the eleventh commandment of ministry: Don't split the church!⁶⁹ For at times of extreme reactivity in a traumatized congregation, it is extremely difficult for an after pastor, who is valiantly attempting to function as a self-differentiated leader, to remember that unity is not the most important goal; and that to take a theological position like that, makes unity a kind of idolatry.⁷⁰

The Dance of Story

The success of a congregation's ability to articulate a new sense of mission, as they discern God's call to them, is buttressed by their willingness to share in the telling of their personal stories which brings us to the third of our dances: The Dance of Story. James Hopewell has written compellingly of the importance of narrative in understanding congregational life. He has reminded us that "the congregation's self-perception is primarily narrative in form [Its] communication among its members is primarily by story [and] . . . by its own congregating, the congregation participates in [the] narrative structures of the world's societies."⁷¹ For it is only by story that we come to know ourselves as individuals as well as ourselves as part of a greater whole in terms of our interrelationships with others. Hopewell also reminds us that all narratives require a setting and that every community develops a corporate world view which is

⁶⁹Ibid., 42.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Hopewell, 46.

conditioned by its particular history.⁷²

That setting to which Hopewell refers is another way of looking at what Moore has described as the intersections where our teaching occurs. In discussing these intersections she notes that persons at these intersections are *simultaneously in process* and are being impacted by the past, the present, as well as the future even if they have not lived through that congregation's past. Furthermore, by their act of affiliating with the congregation, each parishioner has made the congregation's story intersect with their own personal story, as well as the story of their family of origin. As if that were not enough, because the entity we are dealing with is a church, there is yet another story which impacts all of the other stories; that story is God's story which is revealed to us principally through the scriptures.⁷³

What we have, then, is a story triangle: the congregational story forming one side, our personal story forming the second side, and God's story forming the third side. Learning the stories which make up the various sides of that story triangle is the way in which we come to understand the particular intersection in which we find ourselves. Moreover, it is that understanding, for example, which enables us to acknowledge the fact that the congregational mission must change from time to time, if the parish is going to continue to stay alive in its context and be faithful to that ultimate story which is

⁷²Ibid., 55.

⁷³Moore, Education, 111-15.

God's.⁷⁴

The priest has a central role to play as the teacher of God's story in the context of this story triangle. She is the one within the community who has the acknowledged authority to assist the parishioners in understanding their relationship to God.⁷⁵ For it is through these stories which have been passed down to us in the Scriptures, that persons in these abused congregations are empowered to understand the nature of right relationships and appropriate boundaries. Furthermore, it is in the scriptures that one finds all of the

universal conflicts of life. . .the battles between good and evil and the struggle of individuals to contend with themselves, God, and those around them. Such images permit personal identification. . .with these historical personages, their problems-and the resolutions they found to them. . .such stories perform an important role in providing universal paradigms. . .upon which one may project one's personal struggle.⁷⁶

A healthy congregation must have a sense of itself, both in terms of its knowledge of its history as well as a vision of its future direction, for "rootedness in our past tradition and trust in God's future is what frees us from the tyranny of the present."⁷⁷

⁷⁴Martin F. Saarinen, The Life Cycle of a Congregation (Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute, 1986), 17-18.

⁷⁵Rutter, 27-28.

⁷⁶ Donald E. Miller, "Moral Significance of Worship," Religious Education 75, no. 2 (March-April 1980): 199.

⁷⁷Bruce C. Birch, "Memory in Congregational Life," in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed.C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 25.

Thus, the after pastor in these traumatized congregations must immerse herself in the educational task and recognize that all of the various activities of congregational life give parishioners opportunities to learn both the congregational story as well as God's story. Bruce Birch reminds us that we can foster the learning of these stories in the following ways: through both lay and clergy teaching, which underscores the shared leadership model we are trying to foster; through Biblical education for adults and children; through a formal membership affiliation and education process; through the use of visual symbols; and through strong "exegetical preaching."⁷⁸

During the last four years at St. Michael's we have offered a yearly Kerygma class which now has more than thirty graduates; forty-five adults have been confirmed through a formal confirmation education program; both clergy and lay teachers have been utilized in classes for adults and children; and highly symbolic liturgies have been instituted such as our Maundy Thursday Service, which includes an Agape Supper as well as the traditional Stripping of the Altar; the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday; and the Easter Vigil Service on Easter Eve. All of these activities have served to help both old and new members incorporate God's story into their own stories. In addition these, new to St. Michael's, but otherwise traditional communal worship experiences have helped the Parish to connect its evolving congregational story with its rich Anglican historical roots. This is why it is so very important to keep in mind Maria Harris' model of the three curricula in working with these abused congregations because one must

⁷⁸Ibid., 38-42.

always remember that

the community's life together is tied inevitably to all three curricula . . . the explicit curriculum is the form we have chosen in which to say: here is the heritage we wish to hand on; these are the things which make us us. The implicit curriculum is the set of forms, the procedures and processes of our living together as a body politic, which are teaching us . . . the null curriculum becomes the prophetic voice, reminding us of what we have left out, often to our detriment as a people.⁷⁹

For example, at St. Michael's the explicit curriculum is reflected through the ancient Holy Week liturgies which tie St. Michael's to the earliest communities of Jesus people. The implicit curriculum, on the other hand, can be seen through the modification of some of those liturgies such as the Agape Supper which uniquely depicts the people of St. Michael's as a gathered community which understands itself as the Body of Christ.

Finally, the null curriculum is reflected in the commitment to remember the abuse of the past, even though it is denied, by continuing to find vehicles to work through the residual pain which is an undeniable part of the congregational life of St. Michael's. That null curriculum is central to the lives of the people who are still struggling with questions which run the gamut from: "Why did God let this happen?" or "How can I ever trust an ordained person again?" to "I don't believe the Rector could possibly have done anything like that, it's all just been fabricated!" Our attention to the null curriculum helps us to remain mindful that the anger, rage, and confusion of those individuals must have a vehicle for expression. If the church does not allow people to feel that it is

⁷⁹Harris, "Teaching," 246.

healthy Christian behavior to express their anger and to grieve their losses, then we run the risk of robbing them of the ability to be able to experience love and ultimately trust again.⁸⁰

At St. Michael's, in an effort to provide people with an opportunity to work through their anger and loss, we employed the services of a therapist immediately following the disclosure of the third Rector's confession of sexual misconduct. In addition, we have also provided, at least annually, a Grief Group where people can explore issues of grief and loss. It is interesting to note that one thing which has evolved, which was not part of the formal curriculum selected for the Grief Group, has been the desire each group has had to end their seven week sessions with a Eucharist. The desire of these groups to end their time together by engaging in a formal worship experience has been significant. For in the same way that new dances have been created through the centuries to express the emotional needs of a people at a given time, these parishioners, grieving their individual losses, have sought to devise a dance to express their mutual journey toward healing. Donald Miller has spoken to this point in suggesting that "the cognitive-- teaching dimension is important in the educative experience, but not to be ignored is the affective experience obtained in worship."⁸¹

⁸⁰Nancy J. Ramsay, "Sexual Abuse and Shame: The Travail of Recovery," in Women in Travail and Transition: A New Pastoral Care, eds. Maxine Glaz and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 117-19.

⁸¹Donald Miller, "Moral Significance," 203.

The Dance of Worship

It is not surprising then that the final dance of resurrection in our curriculum is the Dance of Worship. Moreover, it is vitally important that the after pastor be conscious of the need to be intentional about the congregation's worship practices if the parish is to move from its status as a community based upon a personality cult of devotion to the abusing clergy person, to a focus on itself as a community which is Christ centered. Central to that shift in perspective is the importance of lectionary preaching. Lectionary preaching insures that the sermon topics will be determined by the lessons which are appointed for that day and not on a topic the preacher has selected.⁸² Donald Miller has also written about the importance of the sermon. Although he acknowledges the variety of symbolic forms which are part of the corporate worship experience such as the architecture, the stained glass, the art work and the music; he contends that it is still the sermon which is the most significant because "it is in that spoken word that 'mental pictures' of specific moral ideals are imaged."⁸³ At St. Michael's the sermon has also provided a number of teachable moments for the fourth Rector to preach on a number of the issues which have been identified as objectives which need to be accomplished in resurrecting these traumatized congregations. For example, sermons have been preached on the abuse of power in relationships, on the corporate nature of Christianity, on the mutuality of Christian discipleship, on the Gospel imperative for the toleration of

⁸²Stein, 67.

⁸³Donald Miller, "Moral Significance," 198.

diversity and inclusivity, and on the congregation's responsibility to minister actively beyond its parochial boundaries.

Therefore, Donald Miller, argues that educators should be mindful of the incredibly significant role which the experience of corporate worship plays in shaping an individual's sense of morality.⁸⁴ For it is in the liturgy that "the central faith story is repeated and related to the themes of the Christian year and to the important issues of life."⁸⁵ Lyle Schaller has suggested that all traditional churches which are thriving have carefully planned traditional worship services which are characterized by excellent preaching and high quality music.⁸⁶ People are looking for a way to find meaning in an increasingly violent and hostile world. In the church they see an institution which they believe can have a significant influence on their development as moral and ethical persons. For it is through participating in the act of worship that individuals are exposed, in a multiplicity of ways, to the "symbols, metaphors, pictures and stories [which] potentially [can] exercise a considerable role in providing an individual with a persuasive moral vision [in] guiding life style choices."⁸⁷ Furthermore, through the corporate experience of confession and absolution an individual is presented with the

⁸⁴Ibid., 193.

⁸⁵Robert Browning, "Belonging: A Sacramental Approach to Inclusion and Depth of Commitment," in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 187.

⁸⁶Schaller, 24.

⁸⁷ Donald Miller, "Moral Significance," 195.

possibility of hope through the gift of grace and the promise of a new life in Christ.⁸⁸

Undoubtedly, there is a profound power in corporate worship which speaks to the hearts of many persons in these intersections where the abuse of clergy power has violated that most sacred of trusts. Moreover, it is the act of coming together as the celebrant community in worship which has the ability, not only to provide great healing in individual persons, but also to educate people into new ways of living in community.

For as Donald Miller has remarked:

There is an incorporative power in the liturgy; in group confessions of faith, the singing of songs, corporate recitations . . . each of which invites the individual to be part of the community. As one participates in these acts, one may indeed feel oneself become more a part of the collectivity. Internally this feeling may be expressed in the sense: 'These are my people, my group my tribe; this is where I belong.'⁸⁹

The liturgy is also a significant means of communicating all that our faith represents. For example, through the rite of baptism the individual is initiated into the Christian community in the midst of the worshiping community. This act serves to underscore the fact that the individual is joining a community with a clearly articulated vision of ministry rather than experiencing a private rite performed by a clergy person who is functioning more like a shaman or a guru rather than an ordained corporate worship leader. Often in these congregations where there has been clergy abuse, private

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., 196.

baptisms have been the norm. Therefore, it is very difficult to get people to understand that baptism is meant to be an integral part of the principal service on the Lord's Day conducted in the midst of the celebrant community into which the baptismal candidate is being initiated. Central to the worship experience of the baptismal liturgy is the Eucharist which through symbol and ritual recounts all that we say we believe as Christians. Each time the people of God gather and share the bread and the wine, they are repeating the central affirmation of the Christian faith which insists that it is a "table . . . open to all within the faith community. . . through which the gospel of God's grace to all people is communicated and celebrated."⁹⁰

It is also important to remember that the experience of worship has other functions which can be enormously helpful in educating persons in these traumatized congregations into healthier patterns of relationship. Because the focus of the worship experience has been on the clergy person as the star in these abused congregations, little attention has been given to the place of silence and contemplative spiritual reflection. In an effort to redress that at St. Michael's, during the last four years mid-week Eucharist services and Quiet Days during Lent and Advent have been used to highlight the importance of silent reflection as part of the normative corporate worship experience. For in congregations which are struggling to emerge from patterns of chronic anxiety and enormous emotional reactivity, giving prominence in the corporate worship experience to meditation as an "organizing center for congregational life,"⁹¹ especially in the

⁹⁰Ibid.

eucharistic liturgy, can serve a very important educational function.

Mary Elizabeth Moore argues that normal congregational life is characterized by what she names as “uproar.” Moore uses this term to describe both the normal frenetic activity of parish life as well as the discontinuity and chaos of the world at large. The question to be grappled with is how the congregation can remain in the world and yet not become of the world in the sense of losing the congregation’s call to discipleship. If one intentionally plans for silence and reflection in the midst of this uproar Moore argues, then a space is created so that the possibility exists for God’s voice to be heard in the midst of the chaos.⁹² This is a most important consideration in these traumatized congregations which are attempting to move from the onerous paradigm of the patriarchal leader into a new patterns of shared leadership with a self-differentiated leader who seeks to work in an interactive manner. Moreover, the inclusion of silence and meditation in the normal experience of corporate worship can serve to highlight the fact that individuals do not need to have their access to their Creator mediated by a priest. Also, it underscores the idea that they are a community of God’s people who are committed to carrying on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world and who, therefore, should be mindful of listening for God’s voice. For as Thomas Groome has noted in building on an observation by Michael Warren:

⁹¹Mary Elizabeth Moore, “Meeting in the Silence: Meditation as the Center of Congregational Life,” in Congregations: Their Power to Form and Transform, ed. C. Ellis Nelson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 143.

⁹²Ibid., 148-51.

If one wishes to find out the lived belief of a particular church, examine the prayers, hymns, and rituals they use . . . to discern what a faith community is teaching most effectively, do likewise. At no time is a church more 'educational' than in the liturgy.⁹³

These then are the dances which must be learned if these congregations, which have experienced the betrayal of the pastoral trust because of clergy sexual misconduct, are to experience new life. It is also true, however, that even after these dances have been mastered, new steps, as yet unimagined, will continue to emerge and will have to be incorporated into the dance. Therefore, if we, who cast our lot with these traumatized congregations by responding to God's call to us to serve as their ordained leaders, will remember the patience that Ralph Tyler has counseled⁹⁴ and trust in God's grace, as Maria Harris has admonished,⁹⁵ we shall, indeed, see resurrection in these congregations; for these folks are, after all, God's Easter people for whom new life is always possible.

⁹³Groome, 360.

⁹⁴Tyler, 83.

⁹⁵Harris, Fashion, 181.

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